

**AS IF THROUGH ANOTHER'S EYES:  
A STUDY OF PEER TUTORING AND FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' REVISION  
BEHAVIORS**

by

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This dissertation explores how first-year students use the feedback they receive from others as they revise their writing. Of particular interest is the feedback students receive from writing center peer tutors. Through analysis of the feedback students received from various individuals (classroom peers, peer tutors, and teachers) in two sites (first-year composition classrooms and the writing center), I clarify the effects that responses from these individuals have on students' revision. To determine the role tutorials, specifically, play in students' development as revisers, I conducted a semester-long study of writing at a liberal arts university. I used two major research strategies: (1) a questionnaire about students' practices of revision and (2) case studies of nine first-year composition students. Data has been collected from interviews, writing center tutorials, first-year composition class meetings, and drafts and revisions of students' papers. This dissertation challenges several established claims within composition studies: that first-year students revise in limited ways; that they usually focus on word-level issues when they do revise; and that the most effective revisions are more reader- than writer-based. In fact, students I studied report that they do have strategies for dealing with their whole texts. Moreover, though many have argued that "experienced writers" revise in a reader-based way, this data suggests that students revise most substantially when readers find a way to help the writers control their words and convey their intentions. Finally, this dissertation challenges the assumption that because writing centers help make "better writers, not better writing," writing center scholarship should

exclude student writing as an object of study. Sustained study of the drafts students bring with them to the writing center and the revised versions they produce after a tutorial offer writing center and composition studies scholars alike a fuller understanding of the role that collaboration generally and peer tutoring specifically play in students' development as writers and revisers.

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## PREFACE

Like every dissertation, this one was a long time in the making and many people have provided the intellectual and emotional support I needed to finish it. I am grateful to my dissertation committee for their interest in my project and for their thoughtful feedback about drafts in progress. I am particularly grateful to Amanda Godley for her guidance as I designed and carried out my study; to Jean Ferguson Carr for her important recommendations about source material; to Jim Seitz for teaching me to carefully render my narratives of teaching and learning, of teachers and learners; and especially to Steve Carr for understanding the way I write and revise, for his commitment to working with me on many different versions of this project, for his always careful reading of drafts, and especially for supporting my work from a distance.

I have been very fortunate to learn from teachers of the highest caliber. At the University of Pittsburgh, I am additionally grateful to the faculty members who have contributed to my understanding of Composition, Literacy, and Pedagogy, especially David Bartholomae, Don Bialostosky, Kathryn Flannery, Mariolina Salvatori, and Jennifer Trainor. My undergraduate teachers at DePauw University helped me find this career path and have continued to mentor me. Thanks especially to David Field, Wayne Glausser, Marnie McInnes, Martha Rainbolt, Mike Sinowitz, and Andrea Sununu: I aspire to be the kind of teacher to my students that they have

been to me. Neal Abraham hired me more than once as a teacher and administrator; I am grateful for his faith in my potential.

The dissertation that follows is based largely on a study I conducted at DePauw University during the Fall 2006 semester. Many teachers and students participated in my research, some anonymously, some in very personal ways. Thank you to Professors Matthew Balensuela, Howard Brooks, Brian Howard, Marnie McInnes, Sherry Mou, Pam Propsom, and Andrea Sununu for allowing me to distribute questionnaires to their students. My dissertation depended upon two teachers allowing me to observe their classes for an entire semester. I am deeply indebted to Gary Davis and Carla Schmidt (whose names have been changed) for allowing me that privilege. Their 30 students – seven of whom are introduced as case study participants in this dissertation – also trusted me to write about them. The writing center tutors, too, allowed me to tape and study the work they do. Though I can only refer to them by their pseudonyms in the pages that follow, I hope they know the depth of my gratitude.

Ellen Gerber Carillo and Kirstin Collins Hanley have been loyal friends who made graduate seminars more rigorous, finishing a dissertation more manageable, the job market less scary, weekends in Shadyside more fun, and special days more memorable. For all this and more, thank you.

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My best friend and husband, Jason Chan, faithfully encouraged this project even though it meant we spent many weeks apart during the data collection phase of my study. He has listened to me talk through ideas, critiqued conference papers and job talks based on these chapters, and supported me and my work in every way. I am thankful for all this, but I am most grateful to him for loving me and for believing in the future we are building together.

Finally, there is one person whose friendship and expertise has influenced this dissertation from its conception. Susan Hahn, Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at DePauw University, hired and trained me as a tutor and as an assistant director; introduced me to Composition Studies and to professional conferences; opened her writing center to me as a research site. Susan has housed me and written recommendation letters on my behalf on more occasions than I can remember. For ten years of friendship and for being an exceptional mentor and role model, thank you.

## **1.0 CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS: REVISION STRATEGIES REVISITED**

DePauw University, a nationally ranked, top-tier, coed liberal arts college is nestled among the corn and soybean fields of west-central Indiana. In mid-August, students return to Greencastle, greeted by humid air and the red brick buildings that line the streets of this campus. Most come from easily traveled distances: Indianapolis and its suburbs, about an hour east; Chicago and its suburbs, 2-3 hours north; greater Cincinnati and St. Louis. Others travel from more distant places. Each year DePauw enrolls students from Minneapolis/St. Paul, Honolulu, Oklahoma City, New York City, California, Texas and places in between. In the fall of 2006, a large number of international students found their way to DePauw as part of the university's attempt to internationalize students' educations.

DePauw's Office of Admission reported that 635 new students enrolled in the Fall 2006 ("Entering Student Profile, Class of 2010"). New students arrive on campus on a Saturday in mid-August, four full days before classes begin on Wednesday. During orientation "week," new students meet their upper-class student mentors who have been chosen on the basis of academic achievement, campus involvement, and character. Each mentor works with a group of 12-15 students. Although the mentor/student relationship extends the full first-year, and often well-beyond, a mentor's responsibility is greatest during orientation when they guide new students

through course adjustments, plan scavenger hunts to introduce them to the university's many offices, and usher them in droves to Marvin's, home of the GCB (garlic cheeseburger).

Monday and Tuesday are filled with activities related to getting ready for classes. All the students who share a student mentor also share a faculty advisor who instructs the First-Year Seminar<sup>1</sup> (FYS) in which the group of students is enrolled. New students meet their advisors within hours of arriving on campus and spend time with them throughout orientation. Advisors explain the graduation requirements and help students make sure they have enrolled in appropriate classes for the fall semester. On Monday afternoon, two days before classes begin, students gather for their first classroom experience, a session called "Preparing for Classes," that is devoted to helping them learn to negotiate the new academic challenges they will face. In these seminars, I met almost 90 members of DePauw's Class of 2010.

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When I began my graduate study at the University of Pittsburgh in August 2001, I participated in an orientation, too: an orientation to teaching first-year composition.

To prepare us for our orientation, the director of the Committee for the Evaluation and Advancement of Teaching (CEAT) sent us course materials and a few articles and chapters to read: "Responding to Texts: Facilitation Revision in the Writing Workshop" (C.H. Knoblauch

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<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 1999, a "First-Year Program" was put into place at DePauw. There are many aspects to this program, but most notable is the linking of "mentor groups" – the oversight of approximately 12-15 new students by one upper-class mentor – with a required First-Year Seminar. Instructors of First-Year Seminars also serve as the academic advisor to all the students in the seminar.

Many universities offer and require First-Year Seminars. Often these are "great books" courses, or at least courses with a common syllabus and reading list. This is not the case at DePauw. Each fall, 40 or so First-Year Seminars are offered by faculty members in every discipline. Students rank up to 10 First-Year Seminars and are enrolled in one of them. In the Fall 2006, FYS offerings included: Why We Read Poetry (Modern Languages), The Quantum Universe (Physics), The Animal Mind (Psychology), Aretha to Xena: An Introduction to Women's Studies (Women's Studies), and Prisons and Race in America (Sociology). Each FYS carries a full academic credit and is intended to provide students with the kind of academic experience more typically experienced by juniors and seniors. Seminars usually require discussion, close reading, critical thinking, and writing and rarely include extensive lectures.

and Lil Brannon), “Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition” (Mariolina Salvatori), “Acts of Wonderment: Fixing Mistakes and Correcting Errors” (Glynda Hull), and Nancy Sommers’s 1980 article “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers.” Sommers’s article most influenced my understanding of what it means to teach students in composition and writing intensive classes.<sup>2</sup> This article summarized the findings of a three-year research study she conducted to compare what students (in a first semester composition course) and what “experienced” adult writers (comprised of editors, journalists, and academics) do when they revise.

Interest in “revision” as a theoretical problem received the most concentrated attention for about a decade, from 1976-1986.<sup>3</sup> Owing to earlier writing process and basic writing scholarship published by Janet Emig (1971), Mina Shaughnessy (1977) and David Bartholomae (1980), scholars who studied revision – including Lester Faigley, Stephen Witte, Linda Flower and John Hayes, and Nancy Sommers – turned to actual students (and professional writers) and their writing in order to make claims about the revisions they make. Based on observations of these writers at work, analyses of their texts, and think-aloud protocols, these researchers called

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<sup>2</sup> The influence of Sommers’s article is evidenced in the scholarship which continues to draw on her work. A representative sample of published work from the last 25 years which cites Sommers’s “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers” includes Faigley and Witte (“Analyzing Revision,” 1981, p. 400); Bizzell (“Composing Processes: An Overview,” 1986, p. 58-59, 65); Coles (“Empowering Revision,” 1986, p. 167); Osborn (“‘Revision/Re-Vision’: A Feminist Writing Class,” 1991, p. 259, 261); Mlynarczyk (“Finding Grandma’s Words: A Case Study in the Art of Revising,” 1996, p. 3,4); Welch (*Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, 1997, especially Chapter 1); Welch (“Sideshadowing Teacher Response,” 1998, p. 376); Cook (“Revising Editing” 2001, p. 158). June Griffin of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln engaged with Sommers’s article in panels at CCCC in 2007 and 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars who published articles on revision in *CCC* and *College English* during this decade include Richard Beach (1976), George J. Thompson (1978), Michael C. Flanigan and Diane S. Menendez (1980), Nancy Sommers (1980), Lester Faigley (1981), Stephen Witte (1981, 1983), Jay Barwell (1981), Mimi Schwartz (1983), Roland K. Huff (1983), Richard Gebhardt (1983), and Linda Flower et al. (1986). In addition, a handful of scholars wrote on the role word processing plays in revision. 1986 also saw the publication of *Facts, Artifacts, Counterfacts* by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky which argues for the integration of conceptual revision into basic writing courses, specifically in Nick Coles’ chapter, “Empowering Revision.”



into question the linear models of writing previously held in high esteem (e.g. Gordon Rohman's prewriting/writing/rewriting and James Britton's conception/incubation/production models). What most distinguished – and continues to distinguish – the “new” concept of revision from those of linear models is the sense that revision does not happen all-at-once (that is, in a single stage) after a draft has been produced; rather, revision is itself a “process” which involves “sequence of changes in a composition – changes which are initiated by cues and occur *continually throughout the writing of a work*” (Sommers 380, emphasis added).

At about the same time as Sommers published her article, Faigley and Witte advanced a similar notion about revision's recursivity: “revision cannot be separated from other aspects of composing, especially during that period when writers come to grips with the demands of the particular writing situation” (411). Similarly, Flowers and Hayes concluded, “The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing. [...] These processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other” (366). Understood as a recursive process, revision refers not only to changes made to writing, but also, presumably, to changes in the way that writers think about their subjects and materials, and to the presentations of those subjects and materials in writing.

Sommers's theory of revision grew out of her observations of experienced writers at work. She found that such writers revised in order to “modify and develop perspectives and ideas” (382) and that this revision occurred as they generated ideas, as they drafted those ideas, as they produced those ideas: in other words, for experienced writers, revision was not a single-step, but “a recursive process [...] with different levels of attention and different agenda[s] for each cycle” (386). In excerpts from interviews with these experienced writers, several

acknowledged that they learned to attend to their whole drafts as they wrote with increasing regularity.

This is not to say that experienced adult writers found it easy to revise their work. The adult writers found revision difficult because revision required them to carefully analyze their own writing and to confront the possibility that sometimes entire drafts must be set aside and started again. One experienced writer from Sommers's study summarized the difficult work that revising necessitates:

[Revising] means taking apart what I have written and putting it back together again. I ask major theoretical questions of my ideas, respond to those questions, and think of proportion and structure, and try to find a controlling metaphor. I find out which ideas can be developed and which should be dropped. I am constantly chiseling and changing as I revise. (384)

As this respondent's comment suggests, revision is not only a matter of tidying words and structure, but also an intellectual commitment to examining the assumptions driving an argument or line of inquiry. Sommers found that what drove the experienced writers in her sample to revise was "a concern for their readership" (384).

Without necessarily enlisting the help of outside reviewers, experienced writers attempted to read their writing from an outsider's perspective when they revised their work. More importantly, this "outsider's" orientation toward the text was not reserved for a single step or stage, but was on-going and continuous as one composed a text because revision is "a part of the process of *discovering meaning* altogether" (385). Whether or not the ideas which initially drove the composition changed, changes in the expression of those ideas that are true revisions resulted from seeing those ideas from new and multiple perspectives. Understood through this

lens, revision is not simply a tool for changing a paper, but an approach one takes toward writing from beginning to end.

Whereas adult writers struggled to revise because it is difficult to imagine others' perspectives, to crack open the moments of dissonance and difficulty within their writing, and to constantly think and rethink the ideas driving the writing on the page, the students Sommers studied struggled even to understand what the term "revise" means; most of them said it was a word their teachers used, not one they used (380). Sommers's data suggested that when students revise, they focus on word-level changes, many of which they make to tidy their work and eliminate repetition; they "understand the revision process as a rewording activity" and that its aim is to "clean up speech" (381). The students in her study produced complete drafts in which they believed their ideas had already been communicated and all that remained was finding a "better word rightly worded" (382) to convey those ideas more effectively. Even when students suspected that there was "something larger" to consider, they did not address that "something larger" in their revision because they lacked "a set of strategies to help them *identify* the 'something larger' that they sensed was wrong and work from there" (383, my emphasis). In other words, Sommers found that students lacked strategies to deal with their whole texts.

Although Sommers found that students resisted making changes to their ideas and to the development of their ideas, she concluded that "it is not that students are unwilling to revise, but rather that they do what they have been taught to do in a consistently narrow and predictable way" (383) and that teachers have a role in helping students "seek the dissonance of discovery, utilizing in their writing, as the experienced writers do, [...] the possibility of revision" (387). Sommers's findings call upon teachers to provide students with opportunities to gain experience with writing by assigning it frequently and by asking them to "return" to that writing even as

they are composing it. Part of that work is accomplished by asking students to read one another's work and, in the process of doing so, figuring out together the "something larger" that is "wrong" with the texts. Teaching students how to identify this dissonance is, according to Sommers, the missing link between students' abilities to write drafts and their tendencies not to revise them.

Sommers's article, then, advanced two important concepts: first, that revision is recursive, and second that revised writing is writing which displays that writers have the ability to imagine readers' perspectives. For the experienced writer, Sommers argued, revision proceeds in a reader-based way. Sommers never explicitly says that the experienced writers are "good" writers, but by characterizing them as "professional" writers and juxtaposing them with the student writers, she suggests that they are, in fact, skilled writers. Thus Sommers implies, at the very least, that skillful writers revise in a reader-based way.

Writing in 1979, Linda Flower defined reader-based writing in terms that resonate with what Sommers observed in her study: "Reader-Based prose is a deliberate attempt to communicate something to a reader. To do that it creates a shared language and shared context between writer and reader" (20). Such reader-based prose differs from what Flower calls writer-based prose in that "Writer-Based prose is a verbal expression written by a writer to himself and for himself" (19-20). In these words about the nature of writer-based prose, too, Sommers's findings echo. Just as Flower claims that writer-based prose tends to be a record of a writer's own verbal thought, Sommers found that "For the students, writing is translating: the thought to the page, the language of speech to the more formal language of prose" (382).

Upon reading Flower's and especially Sommers's work for the first time, my impression was that students are essentially "non-revisers" because, unlike adult writers, the students tended

to make only word- and sentence-level changes without significantly examining their ideas or the shaping of those ideas in words. As a brand new teacher of composition, I took from this essay the sense that my job was to figure out how to help students move from a state of writing “inexperienced” to one of writing “experienced.” Or, as Sommers more generously puts it in her 2004 essay, “The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year,” to help them move from “novice” writers to “expert” writers.

Sommers’s 1980 article also made me see the work of the composition classroom as more idea-focused than word- or sentence-focused. This was not the first time I had been exposed to such a concept. As an undergraduate peer tutor at DePauw’s Writing Center, Prof. Susan Hahn had encouraged us to distinguish between Higher-Order Concerns – HOC’s – and Lower/Later-Order Concerns – LOC’s – as we tutored.<sup>4</sup> Higher-Order Concerns – thesis, development, organization, support/evidence, and clarity of those ideas – were the main elements we addressed in the writing center. If time remained at the end of our sessions we turned our attention to “fiddling with [...] wording, checking [...] spelling, making sure [students] used *you’re* instead of *your*” (Gillespie and Lerner 17). In *The Allyn Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner explain that Lower/Later Order Concerns – word choice, spelling, punctuation, grammar – are important but ought to be considered only after HOC’s have been addressed (17). Perhaps Sommers’s article resonated so deeply with me because I got it: her observation that students mostly saw “the revision process as a rewording activity” (381) resonated with some of my experiences as a tutor. I had also observed what she had observed 20 years earlier, that students sometimes lack “a set of strategies to help them identify the ‘something larger’ they

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<sup>4</sup> Though some have recently questioned the usefulness of this binary, “Higher-Order Concerns” and “Lower-Order Concerns” are terms frequently used in writing center circles. Thomas J. Reigstad and Donald A. McAndrew used these terms in their 1984 manual *Training Tutors for Writing Conferences*. The Purdue OWL defines these terms similarly (“Higher Order Concerns (HOCs) and Lower Order Concerns (LOCs”).

sensed was wrong” (383). I had not only observed it: through my undergraduate work as a writing center tutor, I had already developed skills, I thought, to help students identify that “something larger.”

As invaluable as Sommers’s article is at helping teachers understand where their students begin as revisers, however, it did not provide suggestions about how to accelerate the process of “gaining experience.” Are there assignments or classroom practices that could facilitate student writers’ willingness to revise? In a fourteen week semester, a teacher can only assign so much work, can only provide so much “experience” (number of assignments, the amount of feedback, the opportunities for revision, etc.). Given these limits, what other practices might encourage students to revise their writing in significant and meaningful ways?

These are important questions, ones that I have worked on with varying degrees of success as a scholar and teacher. But another question lingers: Are Sommers’s 1980 findings relevant and accurate a generation later? Those who have taught college composition courses or tutored students in the writing center during the last decade would probably answer “yes,” and cite their sense that more often than not, students focus their revision work on finding better sounding words or cleaning up errors in punctuation and grammar. I might also lament that after a fruitful conference with a student about a paper – a conference in which we find the dissonance in the argument (or the reductive interpretation, the binary thinking, etc.) and generate new ideas – the final product looked agonizingly similar to the draft I thought we had begun to make over.

Nevertheless, a reevaluation of Sommers’s findings seems pertinent for several reasons.<sup>5</sup> First, the five year period from about 1979 through 1984 was particularly prolific in terms of

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<sup>5</sup> In a panel at the 2007 CCCC, “Re-visioning Revision in First-Year Composition,” a team of researchers – Christy Desmet, Wesley Venus, and June Griffin – presented emergent findings from their study of writing at the University of Georgia, Athens that engaged Sommers’s work, though their purpose was not to “reevaluate” it *per se*.

research about students' composing processes.<sup>6</sup> In addition to Sommers, such influential scholars as Flower and Hayes, Sondra Perl, Janet Emig, Mike Rose, and David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky were studying and writing about the ways that students learn to write and revise. It goes without saying – though perhaps it shouldn't – that scholars expect that their research will have an impact on their field. For the scholars above, this surely meant that they expected their work might influence the way that writing was taught not only at the college level, but at all levels of the curriculum. In fact, Nancy Sommers holds a Doctor of Education in English Education which may, in fact, suggest that she expected her research to impact secondary education as much as baccalaureate education. Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that if Sommers's study and article had their intended effect – that is, that teachers would attempt to teach students to revise in a broader way – students entering college today might have more sophisticated understandings of revision than students did in 1980.

Second, students entering college in the Fall 2006 – the Class of 2010 – grew up in a world that differed significantly from the one inhabited by the class of 1980 (for example). Today's college students didn't live through any part of the Cold War and there has only been one Germany in their lifetimes. And while these world events might not seem particularly relevant to students' writing practices, other factors – specifically the changes in computers and technology – have significantly influenced the way that students compose.

In every fall since 1998, faculty members at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin have published a "Mindset" list that aims to "identify a worldview of 18 year-olds," the students beginning college (Neif and McBride). The lists' authors recognize that they make large

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<sup>6</sup> According to my own research and to the research of Nancy Welch, "the actual word *revision* and a consideration of what it can mean rarely appears in composition's theoretical studies of the 1990s" (8).

generalizations and won't apply to all students (or even all students at Beloit College) but maintain that "the list identifies the experiences and event horizons of students as they commence higher education" (Neif and McBride).

Some items on the list published in the Fall 2006 reflect that students in 2006 approach communication – broadly understood – in fundamentally different ways than students could have in 1980. The most notable include:

- They grew up with and have outgrown faxing as a means of communication.
- "Google" has always been a verb.
- Text messaging is their email.
- They are wireless, yet always connected.

As these points indicate, the students who entered college in the Fall 2006 (and were born, mostly, in 1988) have grown up in an on-line world filled with rapidly changing technology; computers, in particular, have significantly impacted the way writing is taught and composed.

Computers with word processing software existed in few homes and schools in 1980. Today computers are a fixture in middle class homes and in most schools. In 1980, most students wrote their assignments out long-hand; final drafts may have been typed, but they weren't exclusively so. In 2007, teachers of college English expect that even "rough drafts" will be word-processed; this is especially true at DePauw and at other institutions with "laptop initiatives." Yet research about the impact computers have on revision has been mixed. Citing a handful of studies from the late 1980's and early 1990's, Betty Bamberg concludes that "computers and word processing do not automatically lead students to make substantive revisions. Instead, the kinds of revisions made reflect the writers' conception of revision and their goals in revising" (114). Word processing software can facilitate substantive (or recursive) revision, but only if a



writer is inclined to make such revisions. However, computers and word processing software do not help writers with the main problem Sommers identified. In other words, technology cannot help writers identify what needs their attention: “Students must also be able to identify the types of larger changes that are needed and have a repertoire of rhetorical strategies at their command to make the needed changes” (Bamberg 114). In fact, word processing programs seem most likely to help students make word- and sentence-level revisions.

Although spell- and grammar-check programs are not fool proof – they don’t always make accurate corrections – such programs do provide some of the “editing” help that Sommers’s students focused on as they revised their work. But grammar checking software can give students a false sense of accomplishment. Robert Lamphear, contributor to *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*, comments, “Grammar checking software [...] cannot revise the students’ essays” (93). Such software “may provide some grammatical assistance and corrective suggestions, which focus on the elimination of passive constructions rather than on the myriad of potential sentence level errors that only a human mind can discover” (93). The downside to using these tools, Lamphear argues, is that “too often students feel that because they used a grammar and/or spell checker, they have revised, or fixed, their essays” (93). Moreover, now that most word-processors include thesauri, the “rewording” toward which inexperienced writers gravitate is almost instantaneous.

Technology is only one of several factors that have affected writing instruction during the last quarter-century. Catherine Haar, a contributor to *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*, reminds us that word-processing programs developed “at roughly the same time as process pedagogy” (17). The writing process movement – in its many and varied forms – is said to have been “born” during the 1963 Conference on College Composition and Communication (Clark 5),

but “Nineteen seventy-one marks the movement in the field of composition from an almost exclusive focus on written products to an examination of composing processes” (Perl xii). The adoption of process approaches often meant that teachers began “tossing out their handbooks and grammar exercises” (Clark 5). Formal grammar instruction, once the bedrock of English instruction, declined. And while, by 1980, process approaches to writing instruction had taken hold in many college curricula, they were only beginning to make their way into the primary and secondary schools. While the students in Sommers’s sample may have first been introduced to “revision” during their college writing courses, many students in 2006 were exposed to writing process techniques much earlier in their schooling.

Because the technology and high school writing instruction today’s students have been exposed to – which have the potential to impact the ways they learn, specifically the ways they write and revise – seem to differ significantly from those of students a generation ago, it stands to reason that many of our assumptions about how students write and revise are outdated. In the spirit of revision – the spirit that warns us not to rest easy on pre-existing formulations – I undertook a small qualitative study of first-year writers to learn how they describe their writing practices and behaviors, specifically as they relate to revision.

A precedent exists for returning to earlier scholarship. Sommers herself continues to design and work on research projects related to students’ development as writers and to revision. She designed and lead the unparalleled Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing and planned to begin a second longitudinal study with more specific research questions beginning in the Fall 2007 (“The Call of Research”). She has also published revisions of her own work and self-reflexive commentary about that work (“Between the Drafts”). Her essay, “Responding to Student Writing” – which is perhaps even more widely circulated than “Revision Strategies” –

also focuses on revision and ways teachers' comments can facilitate the development of ideas. Sommers returned to "Responding to Student Writing" in the December 2006 issue of *CCC*. In "Revisions: Rethinking Nancy Sommers's 'Responding to Student Writing,' 1982," Sommers wrote that she "feels the absence of any real students" (248) in her earlier essay and she draws heavily on the Harvard Study findings as she revised some of her earlier assertions. For example, she says she learned that, "it isn't just that without a reader 'the whole process is diminished'; rather, it is with a thoughtful reader that the whole process is enriched, deepened, and inscribed in memory" (251). Throughout the piece, Sommers alludes to the increased awareness that 25 years of teaching has brought to her ideas about comments on student work. She says she can now ask questions she wouldn't have thought to ask in 1982, and refers to the "new perspective" she gained as a result of the Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing.

Sommers did not exactly replicate her 1982 study for her 2006 *CCC* revision. Nor have I attempted to replicate the work she did for "Revision Strategies."<sup>7</sup> Rather than collecting writing samples and interviewing students to examine their writing, I distributed a questionnaire to students.

## **1.1 QUESTIONNAIRE GOALS AND METHODOLOGY**

My qualitative study began with a questionnaire that I distributed to 87 DePauw first-year students (see Appendix A). This questionnaire asked students to characterize the writing they did

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<sup>7</sup> Sommers describes her methodology for the 1980 study as "a case study approach" (380). It involved twenty students in the first semester of composition and twenty adult writers (journalists, academics, editors). Each writer wrote three essays and were interviewed three times. Sommers coded the essays and analyzed them for four levels of change: words, phrase, sentence, theme (380).

in high school, to identify from whom they sought feedback about their writing, and to describe how they approach writing with a particular emphasis on how they approach revising. My goals for this study were twofold. First, I anticipated that questions about what students do when they revise, proof-read, and edit would give insight into whether or not “revision” remains a word that teachers, and not students, use, or whether in the 25 years since Sommers’s study, students’ familiarity with and practices of revision have changed. Second, I anticipated that some of the questions I asked – those related to past writing tasks and feedback – would help me create a profile of the writing attitudes and behaviors of DePauw’s first-year students.

### **1.1.1 Research Setting**

I designed this study primarily to determine if the revision strategies of students in 2006 differ from those of the students in Sommers’s study. A secondary goal was to study students in a location where they are studied less often. Most composition researchers study students enrolled at the large research universities where they teach. In her 1980 study, Sommers worked with twenty freshmen from Boston University and the University of Oklahoma. More recently, scholars at Harvard, Stanford, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, CUNY, and Pepperdine have conducted and written about longitudinal studies of writing at those institutions.

In recent years, more scholars have focused on smaller institutions.<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Blake Yancey’s *Delivering College Composition: The Fifth Canon* collects essays from a number of scholars who explore the ways that composition is delivered at diverse institutions. In “Delivering Composition at a Liberal Arts College,” Carol Rutz of Carleton College claims that

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to Rutz and her colleagues, Patricia Donahue and Bianca Falbo have conducted archival research about the composition program at Lafayette College.

“liberal arts colleges deliver writing instruction in ways that make them worthy sites for examination” (60) because though “proficiency in writing is desired and valued [...], the teaching and learning that yields that proficiency is left to a process that essentially combines faith in student maturation with osmosis” (61). Rutz’s comment hints at the fact that until liberal arts colleges become sites of composition research, it will be difficult to know what teaching methods lead to proficiency in those specific sites.

That recent research has focused on the situations and locations of composition suggests that teachers and researchers alike accept that an institution’s particular curriculum and location effects the way that composition is delivered there. In *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers*, Lee Ann Carroll foregrounds the importance of “place” in any study of writing. Citing John Alberti who “argues that too many academic discussions of issues [...] focus either on major research universities like Stanford and Berkeley or on high-profile cases such as a decisions to remove ‘developmental’ English and math courses from open-admissions City University of New York” (30), Carroll carefully situates her study of the writing culture at Pepperdine University.

As Carroll’s paraphrase of Alberti suggests, there is reason to believe that location matters. Publications – including Carroll’s – about the studies of writing conducted at various institutions prominently reveal this fact. *Persons in Process* documents and discusses the writing that four college students produced at the University of Massachusetts. In this book, Anne J. Herrington and Marcia Curtis intend to show that many students use writing as a way to figure out who they are. Late in the book, they conclude, “Just as we saw students using drafting and revising to fashion and revise their own self-presentations, they can use such writing to fashion and revise their self- and subject understandings” (377).

In fact, it is interesting to note how similar themes reoccur in the writing turned in by Nam, Rachel, and Lawrence/Steven who were U Mass students and the subjects of Herrington and Curtis's study. For example, because Nam sees himself as a future clergy person, his writing often incorporates references to spiritual teachings. In his psychology class, he struggles to reconcile the tension between his faith in God with knowledge and ways of knowing advocated by social science. Rachel writes several papers about alcoholism, a subject of considerable interest to her since her father is an alcoholic. In addition to a paper for Social Psychology, alcoholism was the topic of her honors senior thesis. Lawrence/Steven's papers contained the most similarity of subject matter over time. As a homosexual, Lawrence used writing to work through his own coming out, and others' reactions to it. Even a story about revealing to his family at Thanksgiving that he is a vegetarian – and their harsh reaction to the news – is a version of the coming-out tale. He eventually devised a “gay studies” major through the five college consortium in Amherst.

In each case, as Herrington and Curtis argue, the students use writing as a way of developing not only a text, but themselves and their identities as autonomous people attempting to negotiate the world. These findings are at least partially related to the culture of writing that exists at U Mass which is strongly associated with Peter Elbow who directed the program prior to his retirement in 2000. In the “Preface” to *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow links control of writing with control of self:

One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words. Especially written words. Words come at you on a piece of paper and you often feel helpless before them. And when you want to put some

words of your own back on another piece of paper, you often feel even more helpless. This book tries to show how to gain control over words. (v)

Herrington and Curtis’s analysis throughout *Persons in Process* echoes Elbow’s sentiment that controlling words goes hand in hand with the control the writer has over his or her life. The location from which Herrington and Curtis write – or the culture of writing that exists in their location – plays a significant role in analysis of the data from that location.

Places like the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Harvard, the University of Pittsburgh, and Cornell – all places with distinctive first-year writing programs or places where students write copiously throughout their educations – are sometimes said to have rich cultures of writing. Smaller schools and schools with less well-known teachers and scholars of writing may also have vibrant and strong writing programs.

Of all the universities out of which longitudinal studies have been published, DePauw most clearly resembles Pepperdine’s undergraduate college which enrolls approximately 2700 students.<sup>9</sup> Liberal arts institutions enroll a significant number of undergraduate students each year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 4253 post-secondary institutions enrolling students in the Fall 2005. Of those, 629 (nearly 15%) were categorized as “baccalaureate” institutions meaning that they “primarily emphasize undergraduate education.”<sup>10</sup> Because liberal arts colleges (a sub-category of “baccalaureate”) typically enroll 3000 or fewer students, only 6% of the nation’s total students (8% of undergraduates) were enrolled in baccalaureate colleges in 2005; nonetheless, that number represents 1.15 million students – not

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<sup>9</sup> While the enrollment at Seaver College, Pepperdine’s undergraduate school, is only 2700, the whole university enrolls about 7800 students (Carroll 31). DePauw enrolls about 2400 undergraduates who make up the university’s entire population.

<sup>10</sup> Other institution types include doctoral extensive; doctoral intensive; masters; specialized 4-year; and 2-year.

to mention their teachers and tutors – who are, I think, still underrepresented in discussions about composition and student writing.

While it would be premature to argue that studies about students and their writing in one location do not apply to students and their writing in other locations, only when more studies like mine are conducted at smaller schools will we be able to feel confident that research published about the students in one setting applies to students in other settings.

### **1.1.2 Data Collection**

I distributed a questionnaire to 87 first-year students enrolled in seven First-Year Seminars.<sup>11</sup> This number represents about 14% of the first-year student population. I chose First-Year Seminars that represented a range of the seminar topics and, presumably, a range of student interests. Those chosen were offered in the Departments of English, Physics, Computer Science, Psychology, and Asian Studies. In addition, I visited two “special” seminars, one offered to students in the School of Music, and one offered to students in the Honor Scholar program. The

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<sup>11</sup> I distributed the questionnaire to students in First-Year Seminars rather than in the college composition course – College Writing – because all students are required to take First-Year Seminars: all students do not take College Writing. At DePauw, College Writing placement is based on students’ SAT and/or ACT scores. Generally speaking, the university can staff 30 sections of College Writing, 15 each in the fall and spring. Enrollment in College Writing is capped at 15 students, although sections are often overenrolled to 16. Therefore, approximately 450-480 students can take College Writing each year. For the 2006-2007 academic year, this meant that approximately 150 students were exempted from College Writing. In 2006-2007, like in most years, about 75% of DePauw first-year students took College Writing.

Students were exempted for several reasons. Students who score a 4 or 5 on the AP Language and Composition exam received College Writing credit. This usually applies to only a few students. It is more common for students to be exempted based on their SAT verbal scores; a score of 650 or greater usually results in exemption. Of the students who take College Writing, the half with the lower SAT verbal scores take College Writing in the fall; the half with higher SAT verbal scores take College Writing in the spring. To survey fall-placed College Writing students would, therefore, not reach a sufficiently broad sample of the students based on College Writing placement.



questionnaires were distributed within the first two weeks of the school year and, in most cases, during the orientation period prior to the beginning of classes.

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When I walked into the seven classrooms, students greeted me with kind smiles. Several students in each class looked simply exhausted, perhaps overwhelmed by their first few days on campus. Nevertheless, every student who was at least 18 years old agreed to respond to my questionnaire. The students in these classrooms took their participation in my research far more seriously than I could have hoped, or imagined. In the physics first-year seminar, several students told me they were “science people” and didn’t have much to say about writing. “But,” one woman assured me, “I’ll do my best.”

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Entering college classes are categorized in many ways. We learn their average SAT/ACT, class rank, and high school GPA.<sup>12</sup> We are told how many students of color have enrolled and, sometimes, from what states they come.<sup>13</sup> We sometimes learn how many were class valedictorians. All these statistics tell us something about the entering class, but they tell us more, perhaps, about our universities: who are we able to “get?” Such statistics tell us little qualitative information about students’ academic backgrounds. And these are surely varied. But, a profile of students’ academic backgrounds may be ascertained and may be useful to university instructors and administrators as they make curricular decisions. I wanted to learn what writing behaviors students at DePauw had cultivated in the past and how these behaviors, specifically

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<sup>12</sup> For DePauw’s class of 2010: Median Combined SAT I score, 1230; Median ACT score, 27; Median Class Rank, 89%; Median Unweighted High School GPA, 3.63 (Entering Student Profile, Class of 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Of the 635 students who enrolled at DePauw in the Fall 2006, 105 are students of color (17%) and 14 are international students, from 10 different countries (“Record Admission Year Yields 639 New Students”). The class of 2010 included students from 36 different states (“President Bottoms Welcomes”).

behaviors related to revision, compare to those behaviors reported by Sommers in 1980. But this information is relevant even without making the comparison to Sommers's work.

If a profile of writers at DePauw could be substantiated over a number of years, such a profile could be useful in planning courses and shaping the curriculum. Some emerging research suggests that if behaviors and practices students learn in one writing class are not reinforced in subsequent courses, those behaviors and practices are not retained.<sup>14</sup> In an article forthcoming in *WPA*, Elizabeth Wardle reports findings from a small pilot study on the “transfer” or generalization of knowledge from first-year composition to other courses students take during their first two years in college. In the draft of this paper, Wardle concludes that “the burden for encouraging generalization seems to rest on assignments given in classes beyond FYC. Those writing assignments must be engaging and challenging, explicitly designed to help students use all the tools in their writing toolboxes—as necessary for achieving the learning goals of the specific classroom activity system” (27). Surely there are practices and behaviors students have learned in high school that we want them to retain in their first-year composition course (and beyond); there may also be practices and behaviors we want to work against.

## **1.2 PROFILE OF DEPAUW WRITERS**

When I interviewed nine students for a separate part of this study and asked them to tell me what they expected writing would be like in college, all of them said they knew they would

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<sup>14</sup> This makes sense: most of us can add and subtract, multiply and divide with ease because we practiced those behaviors in every math class we took from elementary school through high school (and beyond if we continued taking math). But for those who do not have advanced degrees in math, physics, engineering and the like, finding the area under a parabola is probably more difficult since that knowledge was learned late in high school and reinforced infrequently thereafter.

be asked to write frequently and in many classes, not just their composition and other English classes. Sometimes they stated this as fact; sometimes they reported it as information they had gleaned from upper-class students. But the questionnaire data obtained from 87 of DePauw’s new students indicates that most of the students who come to DePauw are already accustomed to writing often and throughout the curriculum in high school. Ninety-five percent said that they wrote “regularly” in high school, and more than 60% of the students understood “regularly” to mean that writing was assigned at least a few times per week. The following table shows the frequency and percent of responses to the question, “Within a school context, what do you consider ‘regular’ writing?”

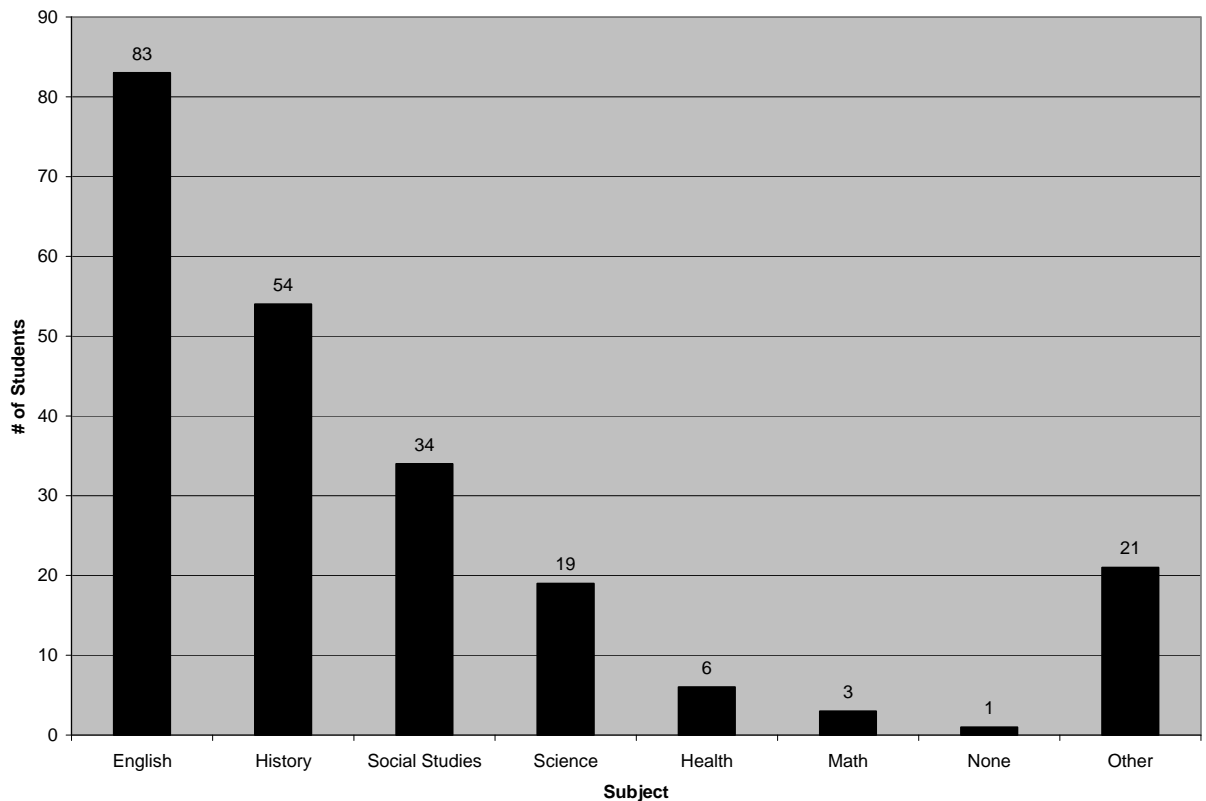
**Table 1.** What do students consider “regular writing”?

	Frequency	Percent
Writing assigned daily during most weeks	9	10%
Writing assigned a few times per week, but not daily, during most weeks	45	52%
Writing assigned once per week, at the most, during most weeks	23	26.5%
Writing assigned periodically, but not even once per week	10	11.5%

A significant majority of students who entered DePauw in 2006 – 83 out of 87 (95%) – reported that they took a course or courses in high school that required “regular” writing. Of the four students who said they did not write regularly for a course in high school, three said “regular” writing meant that writing was assigned not even once a week. The questionnaire asked for no identifying information, so it is impossible to tell at what schools or in what types of school systems (urban, suburban, rural; public, private; low-, middle-, or high-socioeconomic status) writing was not assigned “regularly.” But the high correlation between responses that indicate writing was not assigned “regularly” and that “regular” writing occurs less than once a

week indicates that a segment of DePauw’s new student population wrote significantly less than its peers.

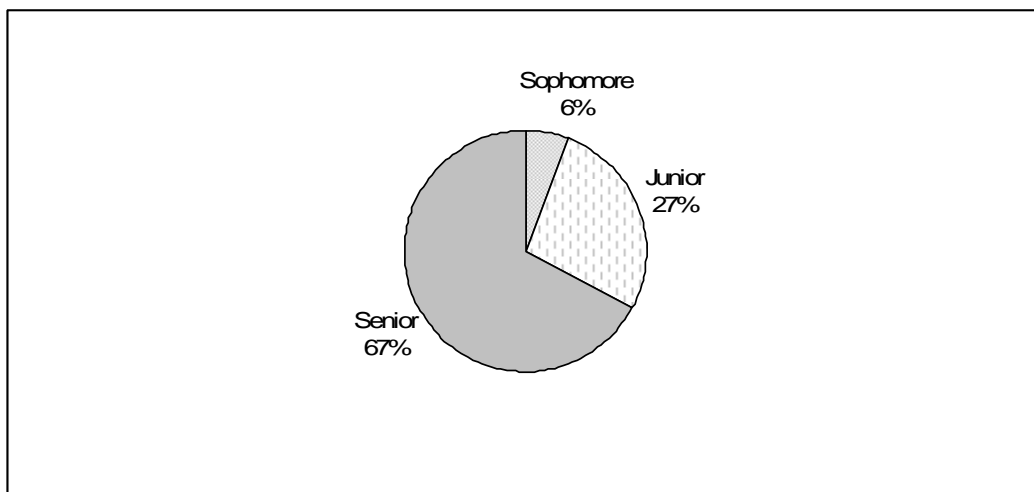
While it seems likely that those three apparently under-prepared students (and the proportion of students they represent) will be at a disadvantage when it comes to writing at the college level, for the majority of the students entering DePauw – the ones who said they wrote a few times a week or even daily – writing has been a consistent part of their high school educations. Moreover, students indicated they wrote in many classes, not just their English classes. The following chart represents the responses to the question “Did you write regularly for a high school class in any of the following subjects?” Students were told to “check all that apply.”



**Figure 1.** Courses for which First-Year Students Wrote “Regularly” in High School

It is perhaps no surprise that students write most for their English classes, but it may be surprising that such a high percentage – 95% – of students report that they wrote “regularly” for English class, and that all but one student reported writing regularly for at least one class.<sup>15</sup> That teachers of history, social studies and science assign writing at least to a fair degree indicates that writing across the curriculum and/or writing in the disciplines practices have infiltrated some secondary school curricula.

The range of responses to the question, “In what one course and year did you write the most during high school” was vast. Almost every student named a course, but some did not indicate during what school year the course was taken. However, the responses indicate that the most writing intensive courses in the high school are taken during the latter years:



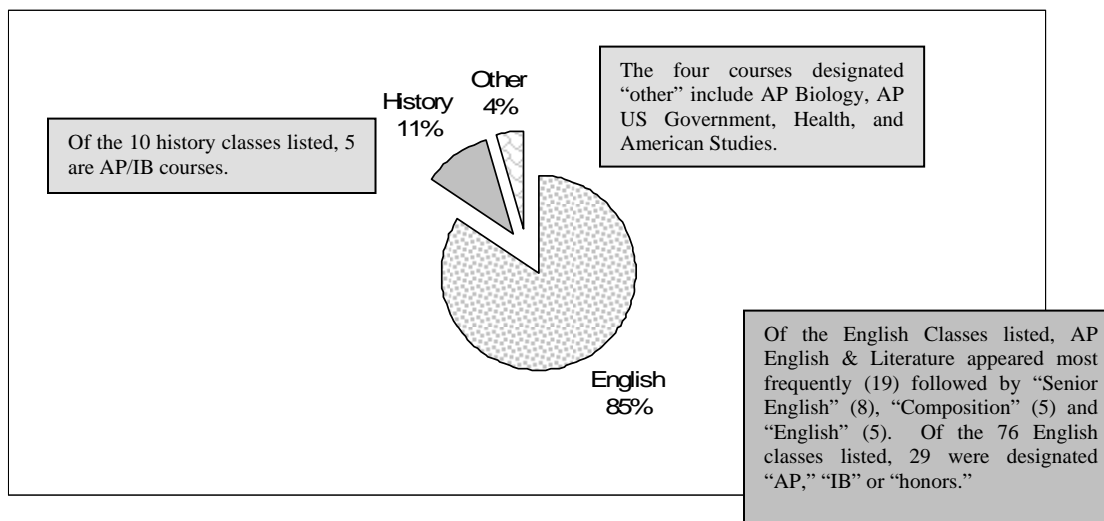
**Figure 2.** High School Class Year During Which Most “Writing Intensive” Course was Taken

The courses in which students did the most writing ranged extensively and include the usual suspects: AP English and other varieties of English courses designated “honors” or “advanced,” Senior English, and courses students take on the high school campus for college

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<sup>15</sup> Subjects listed under other “other” included: foreign languages (Japanese, Spanish, French, Russian) for a total of 6; psychology (2), and Bible/theology (2). One student each listed the following: American Humor, Band, Creative Writing, Computer Science, Economics, Introduction to Law, Politics, Sports Literature, US Government, World Literature and Yearbook.

credit. It also includes a surprisingly large number of history courses – both AP and non-AP – and less traditional English courses in creative writing, expository writing, and journalism. One student each listed AP Biology and health.



**Figure 3.** Most Writing Intensive Course Students Took in High School

Overall, this data reveals that most of the students who enroll at DePauw enter with a fair to significant amount of writing experience. For many students writing is limited to “English class,” but more than half indicated they also wrote outside of English classes. Because so many instructors at DePauw incorporate writing into their courses, whether through lab reports, position papers, literary analyses, essay exams, or formal research papers, having had the opportunity to write for classes outside of English in high school may smooth the transition to a writing-across-the-curriculum environment.

But the profile also gives some pause for concern. The four students who said they did not write regularly for a course in high school represent almost 5% of the sample. And additional 12% of those surveyed think that writing not even once a week is “regular writing.” I suspect students with these backgrounds and attitudes will be surprised by the frequency with which they are required to write at DePauw. These findings underscore that a segment of DePauw’s new

students report that they wrote significantly less than their peers and may face disadvantages when they enroll in courses alongside these apparently better-prepared peers.

### **1.3 MAKING CHANGES TO WRITING: WHAT STUDENTS DO WHEN THEY EDIT, PROOF-READ, AND REVISE**

The most interesting and as yet not well-understood part of students' composing processes, I would argue, is the revision/rewriting aspect. Students' responses to a question I asked – “What do you understand writing as a process to mean?” – suggest that most students revise their work after they have completed a draft of it. To gain more insight into how students think about the revisions they make, I asked three additional questions:

- What do you do when you *edit* something you have written?
- What do you do when you *proof-read* something you have written?
- What do you do when you *revise* something you have written?

These questions are informed by my sense that there is a “useful distinction between revising and editing” (Haar 16). Catherine Haar warns against composition theories that blur the distinction between them because “In blurring the distinction, students and teachers alike overlook conceptual revision” (16). As their responses will reveal, some students do not distinguish between these three – editing, proof-reading, and revising – but I agree with Haar that maintaining the distinction in practice is vitally important if students are to learn that rethinking and reassessing are fundamental to writing development.

By asking these three questions, then, I hoped to learn how students define these commonly listed portions of “the writing process,” and, more specifically, to learn what they

report they do when they edit, proof-read, and revise their writing. In other words, I expected to learn more about students' writing vocabularies and more about their reported writing practices. I asked the questions in the order listed above and students wrote narrative responses to each question. I grouped their responses according to key words in them.

Students' responses to the first question – “What do you do when you edit something you have written?” – fell into 33 categories and a single student's response often fell into more than one category; thus, there are 180 responses noted though there were only 86 respondents. When students edit, they report that they:



**Table 2.** What do you do when you edit something you have written?

<b>Keywords</b>	<b># of Responses Containing Keyword</b>
Fix or correct spelling/punctuation/grammar/typos	36
Improve flow/make the writing smooth	19
Fix mistakes/errors (general)	17
Consider clarity (of ideas and sentences)	11
Make sure it makes sense/is coherent/easy to understand	8
Work on sentence structure	7
Work on quality of content	7
Ask an outside reader for input	7
Explain ideas more fully/expand ideas/add information	7
Add/eliminate sections	6
Eliminate unnecessary elements	6
Read it aloud	6
Consider word choice/diction	6
Make sure it answers prompt	4
Work on presentation of argument: am I conveying my point?	4
Work on expression of ideas	3
Check organization	3
Make sure my essay stays on topic	3
Set it aside	3
Change anything necessary/make adjustments	2
Read paper back to front	2
Work on paragraphs – make sure each one is important	2
Print off hard copy	2
Fix transitions	2

One student each also listed “Work on consistency,” “Check for factual errors,” “Check for MLA format problems,” “Determine if the thesis is clear,” “Eliminate awkwardness,” “Check product against,” and “re-read.” One student did not provide an answer.

Of the 86 student respondents, 53 – nearly 2/3 of them – note that editing involves fixing “errors” of some type: some students specified errors as “grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typos” (row 1) while others referred to correcting errors more generally (row 3). As Sommers noted in “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” correcting errors focuses on “word level” issues. In addition to the “error correcting” responses, only the

category “consider word choice/diction” explicitly relates to word-level changes. Several others – “read paper back to front,” “set it aside,” “work on expression of ideas,” “make necessary adjustments,” “read it aloud,” and “ask for an outsider’s input” – may have “word level” components. Still, most of the elements students concern themselves with when they edit – 101/180 – pertain to something other than word-level changes.

A surprisingly high number of responses – 45 total – related to content and ideas: “work on paragraphs,” “make sure the essay stays on topic,” “work on expression of ideas,” “work on presentation of argument,” “explain ideas more fully,” “work on quality of content,” “make sure it makes sense,” and “clarity of ideas and sentences.” The second most common response noted a concern with “flow” or making the writing “smooth.” In the “Introduction and Overview” chapter of *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*, Catherine Haar and Alice Horning refer to comments about “flow” as “badly-understood and vaguely conceived terms of criticism” that arise from peer-review sessions (5). It is difficult to know whether students mean the flow of their language – Do my sentences read smoothly? Are my sentences all of equal length? – or of ideas: do my ideas follow logically from one to the next? A few other responses – those about printing off a hard copy, reading it aloud, and setting it aside – suggest that students figure out what strategies work best for them and these become important parts of their editing processes.

As the range of responses suggest, students clearly do not share a common understanding of editing, nor do they focus on the same things when they edit.

When students proof-read, they focus on many of the same things they did when they edited, but their responses fell into only 20 categories. A few new categories also surfaced. I identified and counted 107 key words in this tally.

**Table 3.** What do you do when you proof-read something you have written?

<b>Keywords</b>	<b># of Responses Containing Keyword</b>
Spelling/punctuation/grammar/typos	37
Same as edit	14
Fix mistakes/errors (general)	11
Make sure it makes sense/is coherent/easy to understand	7
Re-read/scan/read-over	7
Flow/smooth	5
Mark areas that need to be changed	4
Work on sentence structure/complexity	3
Final check	3
Outside reader	3
Clarity (of ideas and sentences)	2
Check for format problems (MLA)	2
Read it aloud	2

One student each also listed “work on structure,” “check for accuracy,” “work on quality of content,” “check for factual errors,” “read paper back to front,” “check for ‘to be’ verbs,” and “word choice.” Responses related to correcting errors represent a smaller proportion – 44% – in these responses.<sup>16</sup> A few of the new responses – “read over” and “mark areas that need to be changed” – suggest that “proof-reading” is, for these students, a matter of reading and marking the draft rather than correcting errors. This distinction also suggests that students tend to proof-read paper copies of their work and then make the changes in their computer documents.

Finally, I asked students to explain what they do when they revise their work. It was my hope that students would distinguish between the kinds of changes they make when they edit and the kinds of changes they make when they revise. The responses to this question made it

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<sup>16</sup> The proportion is actually higher because twelve of the fourteen students who said that they do the same things when they “proof-read” as when they “edit” noted fixing errors either specifically or generally in response to “editing.” So the proportion of students who deal with “errors” to some extent when they proof-read is higher than 44%.

somewhat more difficult to “tally” answers: the keywords here weren’t as obvious. Still, some patterns did emerge.

**Table 4.** What do you do when you revise something you have written?

<b>Keywords</b>	<b># of Responses Containing Keyword</b>
Make changes based on feedback received	18
Rewrite/Change Sections or Ideas	10
Same as edit	9
Add/Delete	9
Make Changes (vague)	8
Alter Most of the Paper	7
Make it Better	6
Miscellaneous	6
Change errors (general)	5
Change errors of spelling/punctuation/grammar	3
No response	3
Final check	2

The most frequent response is that revising is the act of making the changes identified by those giving feedback. There was some variation within these answers. Several students wrote versions of “the act of changing is revision.” Others said that they “make the changes noted in other previous steps.” A few students see revision as almost a post-writing step: “You turn it in and then after you get a grade or feedback, make changes.” Within these answers, only a few refer to “deformities,” “corrections,” and “fixing.” More students attempt to distinguish between correcting lower-order concerns and changing more substantial parts of their work. Students said they may “completely change portions” or “entire paragraphs,” and that in revision, changes have “more to do with ideas than technical problems.”

The second most frequent answer also pertains to higher-order concerns. Students most often noted examining “thoughts” or “ideas,” adding details or support, and considering thesis and focus. A notable number of students went a step farther and suggested that revising is a matter of changing most of the draft.

Only a few students responded that revising is about correcting errors. And unlike the students who replied that proof-reading was the same as editing, the students who consider editing and revising to be, in the words on one student, “fairly synonymous” have broad understandings of editing. The student who wrote that “[revising] is another portion of my ‘edit’ step” said of editing, “I re-read to look for grammatical errors and overall flow. I look for unclearities and attempt to efficiently express my ideas.” The student who wrote that “revise, proof-read, and edit all seem the same to me” said that “Editing is basically like proof-reading, but you check for the content and see if you stayed on track, take things out or add more.” In other words, the nine students whose responses I categorized as “the same as edit” all understood editing as attending to more than error correction.

These kinds of responses reveal a flaw in the questions I asked. By asking students to distinguish between “editing,” “proof-reading,” and “revising,” it might seem that I am most interested in the vocabulary students use in relation to writing. But my main interest is practice. I had hoped, and perhaps expected, to see that students make some distinction between what they do to their writing when they revise it and what they do to it when they edit it. Or, without using those words, I had hoped to see that students distinguish between the changes they make to their writing: that there are some changes made to ideas; that there are some changes made to the structure; that there are some changes made to sentences, to words, to punctuation. And I had hoped to see that students prioritize the changes they make.

Looking at the data question by question reveals that more students identify error-correction with editing than with revising, and that more students attend to so-called higher-order concerns (making changes to ideas, structure, adding details) when they revise than when they edit. But, some students try to correct errors when they revise and some students work on “the

expression of ideas” when they edit. Grouping students’ responses about what they do when they edit, proof-read, and revise reveals very little about how they prioritize the changes they make. It also fails to reveal if students attend to what I have been calling HOC’s and LOC’s, or if the same students reported working on “errors” (which I would categorize as LOC’s) in multiple responses. Studying the responses to all three questions given by individual students reveals more about whether students have different priorities as they work on a draft. The following responses were given by nine students (about 10% of the sample):

### **Student A**

Edit: *You correct for mistakes; either grammatical or with the subject.*  
Proof-Read: *You read the work, checking for mistakes or errors*  
Revise: *You rewrite the work*

### **Student B**

Edit: *Fix my draft. Grammar errors, punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, etc....*  
Proof-Read: *Read over my edited paper.*  
Revise: *Change it up more. Maybe change an idea or direction of something in my writing.*

### **Student C**

Edit: *read it aloud. and in my head and attempt to catch grammatical mistakes + other mistakes in my writing, change my mistakes*  
Proof-Read: *look for mistakes*  
Revise: *change large blocks of text*

### **Student D**

Edit: *After I write + finish, I let the paper sit for a few hours...then I come back to it and re-read it many times to catch for errors. Usually I also have my friends who are skilled writers read through it for errors + content.*  
Proof-Read: *Same as above*  
Revise: *Correct content errors*

### **Student E**

- Edit: *proofread/get someone else to read my paper and then make the necessary changes.*
- Proof-Read: *read the paper a couple times looking for spelling, grammatical, or general problems in the paper.*
- Revise: *make the changes I found when proofreading the paper. Which sometimes involves changing entire paragraphs.*

### **Student F**

- Edit: *Go through the work entirely and take out or add sentences, switch paragraphs around, incorporate more detail, etc.*
- Proof-Read: *Go through the work entirely and add periods and commas, correct run-ons and incorrect parallelism; spelling; correct grammar overall.*
- Revise: [No response]

### **Student G**

- Edit: *Check my diction, sentence structure, tense, and spelling. Also, check to make sure each paragraph gets a point across that is vital to the argument.*
- Proof-Read: *read it out loud to see if it flows nicely. Similar to editing but less intensive.*
- Revise: *Revising is often changing major or large portions of the essay.*

### **Student H**

- Edit: *Crossed out a sentence that didn't quit fit    add a sentence    move a paragraph*
- Proof-Read: *Check if content makes sense, grammatical errors*
- Revise: *rewrite it not completely but change those things that needed to be changed*

### **Student J**

- Edit: *First look for grammatical errors then the overall flow and content of the writing.*
- Proof-Read: *Mark what needs to be changed the first time through then go back and change it.*
- Revise: *Rewrite or change errors in the draft to make it better.*

With only one exception – the response given by Student A – each set of responses indicates that students attend to both higher-order (content, development, organization) and

lower-order concerns (sentence level concerns, punctuation, grammar, spelling). That is, these responses suggest that students work on both the “global” and the “local” as they change their writing. Student B, for example, “fixes” her draft and focuses on “grammar errors” and “punctuation” when she edits; when she revises, she tends to “change it up more” by focusing on ideas.

The same pattern can be seen in the responses given by Students C, D, and E. They refer to local concerns in several different ways: as “grammatical and other mistakes,” as “errors,” and as “spelling, grammatical or general problems.” They also describe global concerns in interesting ways. For Student C, revising is to “change large blocks of text.” While what changes or how it changes is unclear, it can be inferred that changing “blocks” requires changes to content, to focus, or perhaps to interpretation of textual evidence. Student D’s language – that revising is to “correct content errors” – reveals that he sees both revision and editing as a “cleaning up,” a ridding of things that are wrong. Student E’s practice of revision is the most questionably focused on global concerns. To change the problems she found in “proof-reading” is largely to focus on sentence-level issues; on the other hand, “changing entire paragraphs” could involve an emphasis on content, focus, and audience.

Students F and G, who provide two of the most detailed sets of responses, indicate that they address a wide range of concerns, both global and local, as they work on their drafts. Student H’s sense that to revise is to “rewrite [a paper] not completely but change those things that needed to be changed” perhaps best sums up the responses given: students in this sample enter college equipped with writing vocabularies and having learned that there are a multitude of things that might “need to be changed” in their drafts.



But studying individual students' responses to the set of questions still does not provide much insight into what kinds of changes they prioritize. Student J responded that he "first" looks for "grammatical errors then the overall flow and content of the writing." In this case, it is not clear whether correcting the grammatical mistakes is his priority or simply the first thing he does. (Why grammatical matters are the first students attend to is an important question, too.)

#### **1.4 QUESTIONNAIRE CONCLUSIONS: A STARTING POINT**

The questionnaire that I have described above and the responses to it helped me accomplish two things. First, it provides a useful profile of the writing practices and behaviors of the students who enroll at DePauw University. While it seems unlikely that such a profile would equally describe first-year students at the University of Massachusetts, or Harvard, or Stanford, or Pepperdine (all sites of published longitudinal studies), it also seems unlikely that the profiles of students at those places describe students at DePauw.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the data obtained from the questionnaire provides a useful description of a student population – students at top-tier Midwestern liberal arts colleges – that is frequently absent from published discussions about first-year composition, writing program administration, and writing development.

Second, the questionnaire suggests that there is value in reexamining some of the research that we draw so heavily upon. The responses to my questionnaire suggest that some students now use the word "revision," and that they often associate the practice of revision with making substantive changes, not only word-level changes, to their work. At least two other

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<sup>17</sup> It seems reasonable that this data would apply to students at places like Denison, Hope, Kenyon, and Oberlin (all competitively ranked GLCA member colleges and universities).

compositionists have made similar claims. In *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, Nancy Welch refers to anecdotal evidence: “While it’s generally thought that students view revision as a mechanical activity of correcting errors or as punishment for not getting a piece of writing right the first time, my classroom and writing center experiences tell me that many of our students *do* understand revision as a rich, complex, and often dramatic life-changing process” (135, emphasis retained). In her 2007 CCCC talk titled, “What do Today’s Students Say about Their Revision Process?” June Griffin reported similar findings from a study undertaken at the University of Georgia, Athens. Based on data collected there, she concludes that,

What we see in all of the students’ reflections on their writing is very different from what Nancy Sommers had found. According to Sommers, students usually describe revision as choosing better words and eliminating repetition. Students, she said, “did not use the terms revision or rewriting...revision was not a word they used, but the word their teacher used.”

This is obviously not true of the students in our study. In fact, the portfolios I examined demonstrated not only students’ willingness and ability to use the word revision but to define it, and to define it rather well.

Griffin then quotes from the opening of one student’s portfolio introduction: “Of all the evolutions my English class has inspired within me, the greatest revolution I have experienced through writing and rewriting my papers is that the definition of revision is not editing. [...] Revision is not just a reconstruction of a paper, but also the reconstruction of the writer.” While it seems possible that this student is drawing on language a teacher used to distinguish revising

and editing throughout the term, her new understanding of revising – if it has truly caused an “evolution” in her – ought to serve her well in her future writing courses.<sup>18</sup>

None of the students in my sample offered such a dramatic and pointed definition of revision, but their responses did reveal that some of them, unlike the students in Sommers’s sample, do use the word “revise” and that, whether or not they use the word revise, they attend to more than word-level concerns. Students in my sample said they “look critically” at what they have written, that they “make changes based on new information that I have learned or rethought” and that they will “examine thoughts in more detail and decide if any of them can be expanded upon further.” In these responses – and in many others given above – evidence that students make substantive changes to their papers abounds.

On the other hand, the students in my sample still see revision as something to do to their work after they have finished a draft. Few said that revising has to do with thinking, or that revising could involve examining the assumptions or evidence provided. No one said that revising could take place before a word is even written and throughout the course of composing. No one suggested that revision is, to use Sommers’s word, “recursive.”

Still, the data I collected suggests that most students attend to different concerns when they “edit” than when they “revise.” This finding seems particularly important because Sommers studied students enrolled in a composition class during their first-year of college: I polled students before classes even began.

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<sup>18</sup> I raised this question –about whether the student was “parroting” language used by her teacher – during the 2007 panel. For her 2008 CCCC panel, Griffin and her colleagues studied students’ portfolio introductions for evidence that students drew on the language of revision found in course documents (assignment guidelines; e-portfolio grading rubrics etc.) as they composed them. They found no evidence that students were drawing on the language used in these course documents.

The questionnaire portion of this study, then, suggests that students bring different writing practices and behaviors to college with them than students a generation ago. But knowledge gained from such a tool leaves many questions unanswered. For example, how students revise their work – and whether they actually do – cannot be assessed through questionnaires alone. To begin to understand how students revise their work, and in response to what cues, a study of another kind is required. The longitudinal studies Carroll, Herrington and Curtis, Marilyn Sternglass, Andrea Lunsford, and Sommers have undertaken in the last decade reveal how varied students’ writing development is.<sup>19</sup> In her 2007 CCCC panel, Sommers revealed that Harvard plans to begin another longitudinal study with a much smaller focus than the first one which sought to “gain a better understanding of the role writing plays in a college education” (“Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing”). Sommers admits that determining what role writing plays in a college education is a question that could never adequately be answered and encouraged those about to embark upon studies to narrow their research questions.

The study that I report on in the following chapters is not a longitudinal study; I followed students for only one semester, their first semester in college. It is better described as a case-study. During the Fall 2006 semester, I observed and studied nine first-semester college students enrolled in two sections of College Writing (DePauw’s first-year composition course). The goal of my research project was to learn what facilitates students’ revision of their own work. I will show in later chapters that the questionnaire reveals that the “feedback” students receive from others about their writing is perhaps the greatest facilitator of revision. But students receive

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<sup>19</sup> If the panels at the 2007 CCCC give any indication, the number of colleges and universities that have recently begun or are about to begin longitudinal studies is burgeoning. A crowd of over 100 gathered to hear the panel, “Identifying, Documenting, and Understanding the Effects of What We Do: A Comparative Discussion of Longitudinal Research Questions, Methods and Outcomes.” During the Question and Answer session of this panel, as well as those at talks by Sommers and by Lunsford, many audience participants asked questions prefaced by statements that longitudinal studies were “about to begin at Institution X.”

feedback about their work from multiple sources: classroom instruction, peer response groups, writing workshops, and writing center tutorials (not to mention roommates, parents, and friends). I am particularly interested in the revisions that students make based on peer tutoring sessions in the writing center.

Common sense tells us that writing center tutorials help facilitate revision, but very little writing center scholarship specifically addresses the relationship between tutorials and revision, or the effects tutoring has on student revision. This may stem from the influence of Stephen North's influential 1984 essay "The Idea of a Writing Center." In this essay that is included or paraphrased in many contemporary tutor training manuals (Murphy and Sherwood, 31-46; Gillespie and Lerner, 36; Barnett and Blumner, 63-78) and has been anthologized as a "Landmark Essay on Writing Centers," North asserts

in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. In axiom form it goes like this: our job is to produce better writers, not better writing. Any given project – a class assignment, a law school application letter, an encyclopedia entry, a dissertation proposal – is for the writer the prime, often the exclusive concern. That particular text, its success or failure, is what brings them to talk to us in the first place. In the center, though, we look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it as an occasion for addressing *our* primary concern, the process by which it is produced. (438)

North aimed his words at English Department colleagues who didn't understand the nature of the work that happens in the writer center. And yes: tutors are trained to empower writers to learn to craft more effective texts. But the exclusive focus on writers has lead us, I think, to ignore the

writing altogether. To even ask the question “How did the writer change his/her text after a tutorial?” seems at odds with the idea of what writing centers do. My study of the intersection between peer tutoring and revision considers the relationship between what happens in a tutorial and what changes students make to their texts when they leave the writing center.<sup>20</sup>

In the chapters that follow, I continue to focus on revision and feedback by describing the nine case study students and the composition courses they were enrolled in, and by analyzing the writing they produced, and the effects of the collaborative learning, including tutorials, in which they participated. Chapter 2, “Workshops and Other Forms of Peer Response,” introduces the case study of first-year writers including the composition curriculum at DePauw, the two sections of College Writing II that I observed, and a few of the nine first-year students who allowed me to study their tutorials and writing. This chapter looks specifically at the feedback students receive about their writing from classroom peers. This feedback comes in a variety of forms including through workshops and peer response groups. Classroom peers, though often less experienced readers of others’ work than peer tutors, do possess at least one advantage: they are familiar with the texts that they and their peers are writing about. However, analysis of students’ comments on one another’s papers reveals that although classroom peers possess more knowledge about an assigned text than peer tutors, classroom peers rarely draw upon their own knowledge of the assigned texts when offering feedback to their classmates.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn to the feedback students receive from writing center peer tutors. Unlike classroom peers, writing center tutors are trained to offer students feedback that

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, David Bartholomae noted this problem of failing to consider students’ products in “Inventing the University,” an essay that I will consider in relation to writing center tutorials in Chapter 3. Bartholomae asserted, “The challenge to researchers, it seems to me, is to turn their attention again to products, to student writing, since the drama in a student’s essay [...] is as intense and telling as the drama of an essay’s mental preparation or physical production. A written text, too, can be a compelling model of the ‘composing process’” (83).

will allow them to deal with their whole texts. Ideally, after identifying a paper's weaknesses, writing center tutors help students figure out how to improve upon those weaknesses. To use Sommers's language, tutors are trained both to assist students with the "something larger" they sense is wrong with their papers and to help them "work from there."

The writing center sessions I video-recorded for this study suggest that students call upon peer tutors to help them with many different writing tasks. Sometimes students need help getting started because they have trouble understanding what assignments ask of them. In Chapter 3 – "Tutoring that Helps Students 'Invent the University'" – I situate writing center tutorials within Composition Studies scholarship more broadly and argue that tutors can help students navigate themselves into and "invent the university" for themselves. When tutors engage students in discussions about the ideas they are trying to express in their writing, these conversations can help new students think and write more like "academics" and "scholars" do.

Most often, tutors work with the drafts that students bring with them to the writing center. In Chapter 4, "Something Larger: Tutoring that Fosters Revision," I examine a number of these drafts, and their revisions, and argue that time management, students' investments in the strategies tutors offer, and students' confidence in themselves contribute to the degree to which students revise their work. Claims and arguments to this effect have previously been made on behalf of the work writing centers do. My arguments, however, are supported by a type of data rarely obtained for writing center scholarship.

Chapter 5 – "Is Enough Ever Enough?: The Problems and Potentials of Multiple Sources of Feedback" – deals with those students who receive feedback from multiple sources – peers, tutors, teachers, and others – on a given paper and illustrates the challenges associated with integrating those voices with their own intentions. This chapter begins with findings based on the

questionnaire data I asked about feedback. This data reveals that students are accustomed to asking for and receiving feedback about their writing from many different sources: teachers, peers, and parents. I then turn toward a handful of writing center sessions in which a voice besides the student's and tutor's affected the student's willingness to revise. In chapter 5, I argue that it is when feedback is abundant, and when one suggestion conflicts with another, that student's own intentions and sense of what is important emerge most powerfully in revisions.

In Chapter 6, I complicate the idea that revision is best when it is "reader-based." In addition, I describe what surprised me about the data I collected and suggest what implications these surprises have for my research, for tutor training, and for future writing center scholarship.



## **2.0 WORKSHOPS AND OTHER FORMS OF PEER RESPONSE**

### **2.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Whereas the first strand of my study dealt with students' reports about their revision practices, the second strand of my study examined the teaching of revision in semester-long first-year composition classes with an emphasis on the role peer tutors at the university's writing center play in the shaping of students' practices of revision. At DePauw, College Writing II is the required first-year composition course. In order to acknowledge and study the many places from which revisions might arise as students craft their texts, I studied students in two primary locations: College Writing II classrooms and the writing center.

While I am primarily interested in how writing center peer tutors assist students' in their revision process, in order to understand what influence a tutorial has on a revision, I also need to know what students learn about revision in other contexts, especially in the classroom. I recognized the importance of the classroom observation when Kiki, one of the study participants enrolled in Gary Davis's class, regularly asked her writing center tutors how to make her conclusion "come full circle" and when some of the participants enrolled in Carla Schmidt's class referred to the fact that they needed to make their thesis statements more "over-arching" and that they "struggled with the intent-thing." Had I not observed their classes, I may not have realized that Kiki's question about her conclusion stemmed from a comment Davis made during

a class session. The same was true of the comments made by Schmidt's students who were genuinely trying to do what Schmidt asked them to do.

By observing two teachers' classroom practices and what they emphasized about writing, I realized that some of their students revise based on what they perceive are teachers' expectations, especially when teachers ask them to do something that they have not done before. Schmidt, for example, asked her students to conclude on a "thoughtful, perhaps surprising note." A few of the students in my study struggled with this direction because they had previously been told not to introduce anything new in their conclusions. More than attempting to "please" their instructors, when these students asked their tutors to help them do the things their teachers asked them to do, the students appeared to be attempting to learn specific moves that, though unfamiliar to them, were valued by their teachers and, by extension, by the academy.

While this finding – that students' revisions are often cued by teachers' comments – may not be particularly surprising, it is interesting, I think, that students internalize teachers' language and ask tutors to help them determine whether they have accomplished what they think their teachers want them to do. It seems, then, that some students see the writing center as an extension of their classrooms and their tutors as individuals who have the authority to confirm or deny that they have met these expectations.

While the majority of this dissertation (Chapters 3-6) will analyze what tutors and students discussed during writing center tutorials, this chapter focuses on the classroom instruction 30 first-year students received. More than learning what teachers emphasized in terms of writing and revision, by observing the two classes I also learned how each teacher approached in-class peer response activities which are typically intended to help students help one another improve their writing.

The sole method of data collection during classroom sessions was handwritten field notes. These field notes related primarily to discussions of assigned texts, teacher instructions about writing and revision, and students' observations about one another's writing. All but one of the students enrolled in both of the College Writing sections I observed agreed to be research participants and granted me permission to take notes about things they said and did during class.

A few days into class, I invited all the students to participate in the more in-depth case study portion of my research. In total, nine students – four from one class and five from the other – agreed to participate. Seven of these nine students will be introduced in the next four chapters as I discuss the data collected.<sup>1</sup> The case study participants were recruited on the basis of whether or not they thought they might use the writing center “regularly” during the semester.<sup>2</sup> “Regularly” was not defined and students were not required to visit the writing center any minimum number of times. In the end, I observed two students visit the writing center only once; five students visit 2-4 times; and two students visit five times or more.<sup>3</sup>

Students in the case study agreed that I could video- and audio-record their sessions and agreed that I could photocopy all of their written work – drafts and final copies – from the semester in order to study the changes they made to their work. They also agreed to be interviewed three times (once within the first month of class, once at midterm, and once just after

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<sup>1</sup> Two of the nine case study participants – Charles and Mary – are named only briefly. Though they did participate in this research, their tutorials (only 3 total between the two of them) and writing samples were not among the most interesting examples and so they are not prominently featured in my discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Further details about the nature of DePauw's Writing Center are given in Chapter 3. It is important to note that DePauw's Writing Center is visited by students on a volunteer basis. As a general rule, faculty members do not require individual students to attend the writing center as is the case at many writing centers. Rather, the students who come to the center generally come voluntarily.

<sup>3</sup> These numbers reflect the number of times I recorded students in the writing center. Because of scheduling conflicts and because some visits occurred before the study began, I was unable to record every visit every student made. Based on writing center data from the Fall 2006 semester, two of my study participants visited the center only once; four students visited 2-4 times; three students visited more than five times including one student who had 17 tutorials.

the semester ended). These audio-taped interviews focused on how students perceived their writing behaviors and development.

The twenty writing center peer tutors were also asked to participate so that the first-year students could choose to work with any available tutor.

### **2.1.1 Researcher's Role**

My relationship with DePauw University and its writing center began long before this study did. I enrolled at DePauw as a first-year student in 1996. During my junior and senior years (1998-2000), I was a tutor in the writing center, and in the academic year following my graduation (2000-2001), I worked at DePauw as a "Writing Center Intern."

I began my graduate work at the University of Pittsburgh in 2001 but took a leave of absence from the program during the Spring 2004 semester when I returned to DePauw to direct the writing center while the permanent director was on sabbatical. One of my responsibilities was to recruit and hire new tutors for the Fall 2004. In addition to directing the writing center, I taught two sections of College Writing II. In the Summers 2004 and 2005, I was hired by Academic Affairs and worked predominantly with the incoming students by advising them and helping with class enrollments.

When this project began, I had a nearly ten year relationship with many DePauw faculty members and some administrators, including the writing center director. I had, then, close familiarity with institutional policies and practice. However, the two instructors whose classes I observed were largely unfamiliar to me. I had met them both in passing when I worked at DePauw in 2004 and 2005, but prior to the beginning of the study I had not spent any significant

time with them, nor did I know much about their pedagogies. The first-year students enrolled in the two sections of College Writing II were also completely unknown to me.

Of the twenty tutors working in the writing center during the Fall 2006 semester, I had taught only one (during Winter Term 2004). That tutor was never video- or audio-taped because none of the study participants were tutored by her. In the Spring 2004, I hired one tutor (then a first-year student) who was still tutoring during the Fall 2006 (then a senior).

Given that most of the participants knew nothing about me and the others knew little about me, I provided all the potential participants with as much relevant information about me and my study as I could without compromising the integrity of the research. I encouraged the two College Writing II instructors to speak with faculty members who knew me and my work before agreeing to participate and I know that at least one of them did.

The students enrolled in the classes and the tutors were remarkably generous in granting me permission to observe and record them. The consent forms I provided to each group of participants outlined my objectives and provided them with many ways to contact me. Because I was on campus so much during the semester – in classrooms, in the library, in the writing center – I think that any initial apprehension students may have felt quickly dissipated. A few of the tutors initially expressed some reservation about being taped without advanced warning, citing that sometimes they tutored in sweats and without giving much thought to their appearances. To alleviate their fears of looking unkempt on tape, I notified tutors by email when I knew that I would be taping one of their sessions. This small gesture illustrated my commitment to making this study as unobtrusive and as comfortable for all the parties involved as possible. A few of the tutors who were taped regularly (because they tutored at times the case study participants found convenient) told me later that they frequently forgot the tape was even recording them.

I did not participate in the tutoring of any student enrolled in my study. However, both classroom teachers and I agreed that it would seem strange for me to be completely unengaged in the classroom. Both classrooms consisted of long rectangular tables with chairs around the perimeter. Whenever a chair was open (e.g. someone was absent), I seated myself at the table. I did not participate in class discussion, but I was engaged in that if someone said something funny, I would laugh; if someone said something particularly smart, I may have nodded in agreement; if asked to weigh in by one of the instructors, I would. On one occasion late in the semester, when one instructor could not be in class because of a family emergency, I lead his class in an activity related to the photographs they were using to write their next paper. I suppose that my involvement in the classrooms was more pronounced than it was in the writing center; however, I never participated in any way that related to instruction about revision which was the primary focus of my observation.

As a graduate student conducting this study, I found myself uniquely positioned between the Assistant Professors teaching College Writing II and the undergraduate peer tutors working in the writing center. On the one hand, I was observing faculty members teaching the course that will one day, I expect, be the “bread and butter” of my professional identity, and on the other, I was working with and observing tutors doing the work that helped me decide to follow this path.

As a DePauw alumna and a person who wants to teach and direct a writing center at an undergraduate institution, I felt protective of the university, the participants, and the work they were doing in both the classroom and the writing center. And that protectiveness could easily blind me not only to some of the less effective university wide policies, but more importantly to some of the more underwhelming moments and moves in both settings. While I cannot claim that any of the analysis that follows is strictly “objective,” it is my sincere aim to analyze the data

from this study in a way that is simultaneously generous and critical and drawn from my insider's and outsider's perspective.<sup>4</sup> In rereading my analysis, I found that I have sometimes too critically evaluated an approach taken by a tutor in the writing center and at other times that I have too generously read a revision made by a student (and vice-versa). My simultaneous position as insider and outsider enabled me to analyze what I observed with a sense of institutional history and practice but also from the perspective of one who can consider the limitations of some of those practices.

## 2.2 THE COURSE: COLLEGE WRITING II

The required composition course at DePauw is College Writing II/English 130. College Writing I, DePauw's basic writing course (sections offered to native and to non-native speakers of English), is typically taken by fewer than 30 students per year. Although College Writing II is technically "required," 20% of entering students are usually exempted from it (based on SAT-V scores) or receive credit for it by scoring a 4 or 5 on the AP Language and Composition exam.

The Writing Program Coordinating Committee (WPCC) writes instructional guidelines for all DePauw's writing courses (College Writing I, College Writing II, and W competence<sup>5</sup> courses). The guidelines for College Writing II present a description for the course and offer instructors parameters in which to design interesting courses (see Appendix B). The WPCC

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<sup>4</sup> Of her own bias in *A Kind of Passport*, an account of her ethnographic study, Anne DiPardo writes, "While I claim no 'objectivity' for the portraits that follow, I can say that they were informed by an ongoing monitoring of my own biases and responses, and I leave it to the reader to judge their fairness and plausibility" (32). Upon rereading these words after some initial drafting of portraits of classroom and writing center moments, I found DiPardo's words to resonate with the approach I had taken.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to College Writing II, all DePauw students are required to take a course designated "W" – or writing intensive – before they complete their sophomore year. More information about the W competence requirement is found in Chapter 3.

guidelines describe College Writing II this way: “This course introduces students to college level critical inquiry through reading and writing practice” (WPCC 3). These guidelines further stipulate that class size will be limited to 15 students; however, in order to enroll the maximum number of students in College Writing II and to ensure first-year students have full course loads, this enrollment limit is often raised to 16 as it was during the Fall 2006 semester.

From there, the guidelines become broader to allow individual instructors to design courses that fit their interests. DePauw’s English faculty does not include anyone trained specifically in Composition Studies and, because it is strictly an undergraduate institution, there are no graduate student TA’s to teach sections of this course. Instead, sections are staffed predominantly by DePauw’s full-time English faculty – most of whom are tenured or tenure-track – who teach literature and creative writing courses. Each year the English Department employs a number of people in full-time, term positions. Sometimes they are ABD’s, but, in today’s tight job market, they more often hold PhD’s. The WPCC guidelines for College Writing II allow for great variation among sections in order to allow instructors of the course to teach material they feel most engaged in and most equipped to teach.

This is not to say that the course is a “free-for-all.” In fact, the guidelines quite clearly mandate that College Writing II will be a reading and writing course: “Readings for the course should be substantive, and have traditionally been selected from various genres: critical essay, memoir, novel, drama. The emphasis is on developing critical reading skills, not introducing genres. Many instructors organize the readings around one or more themes” (WPCC 3). This sort of course is certainly not unique to DePauw. For example, the description for “Expos 20,” the required composition course at Harvard, states that each essay students write “will require [them] to make an argument” and that “Most essays will involve close-reading of textual evidence, and



several will require you to use sources of different kinds” (“Expos 20 Requirements”). While the Harvard Expository Writing Program stipulates what types of assignments and how many will be completed by students, it also allows for great flexibility in the topics of the courses offered as Expos 20. The topics for Fall 2007 courses (listed on the website) range from “Technological Culture” to “Murder” to “Love and Power in Shakespeare.”

DePauw’s WPCC guidelines further stipulate that a minimum of 18 pages will be evaluated. Based on a review of syllabi, it is clear that few instructors assign only the minimum and many assign significantly more writing than this minimum. The guidelines also stress the importance of process – “English 130 will teach the process of writing. Students will learn that a writing assignment is a series of tasks, which include finding, evaluating, analyzing and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources along and integrating their own ideas with those of others” – and echo this sentiment in relation to page length: “One end-of the semester 18 page paper does not accomplish the goals of the course, unless it has been developed out of shorter sequenced drafts due throughout the semester.” Though “process” is discussed specifically in this section, practices typically associated with process – drafting, collaborating, revising, editing – do not appear here.

Finally, though College Writing II is perceived as a “service course” by many DePauw faculty members both inside and outside the English Department, the WPCC guidelines resist describing it as such. Under “Outcomes,” the WPCC writes,

By the end of the course students should:

- understand the uses of writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating

- demonstrate flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing and proof-reading
- understand how genres shape reading and writing
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- be able to critique their own and others' works

With the possible exception of the reference to “flexible strategies,” none of these criteria suggest that College Writing II is a course that primarily serves other disciplines. Rather, throughout the guidelines it seems clear that College Writing II, though primarily a composition course, should also engage students in particular content drawn from assigned readings.

### **2.2.1 Carla Schmidt's Course<sup>6</sup>**

Carla Schmidt, an Assistant Professor in DePauw's English Department, joined the faculty in a full-time, term position in the Fall 2004. Although trained in comparative literature, Schmidt teaches a heavy load of composition – usually two sections per semester. Her approach to the course can best be described as a cultural studies approach. In “Cultural Studies and Composition,” Diana George and John Trimbur assert that “In matters of classroom practice, cultural studies is no doubt most closely associated with bringing a more deliberate use of popular culture and media studies into the composition course” (81). Schmidt's Fall 2006 course – subtitled “Writing about Culture” – makes such deliberate use of popular culture and media studies. Schmidt describes the content of the course as the study of “interrelations between what

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<sup>6</sup> The names of the teachers, tutors, and students involved in this study have been changed to protect their identities. This decision was made based on the IRB protocols that were used for this study.

texts communicate, how they go about it, and by what means; or, to put it differently, the interrelations between meaning, method, and medium” (Schmidt 1).

Schmidt used Robert Atwan’s textbook *Convergences : Message, Method, Medium* as the textbook for the course. In addition to reading selections from this book, students also read Dorothy Allison’s “autobiographical novel” *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and the essay collection *Naked* by David Sedaris. One of the most notable aspects of Schmidt’s course is her thoughtful integration of campus events – the film series, a poetry reading, a film studies lecture, and an art exhibit – into the required list of “texts.” Schmidt explained her choices this way:

This course pulls you into the diverse cultural life of the campus, but it also offers you some overlapping thematics, most prominently through the representation of family and community. Autobiographically inflected books by contemporary American authors Dorothy Allison, Sherman Alexie, and David Sedaris are provocative attempts to represent the challenges of growing up in a particular family, community, and environment. The films—Secrets and Lies, Vera Drake, Transamerica, and Harold and Maude—offer additional insights into those challenges through a different medium. It is your task to make connections between these representations and to develop and analyze them in class discussion and in your writing. (1)

The strength of Schmidt’s plan for this course lies in the ambitious attempt to engage students in the “diverse cultural life of the campus” and reflects the sense within cultural studies that “content is right under our noses, in the culture of everyday life” (George and Trimbur 82). Though a small university, DePauw regularly attracts prominent scholars and from many fields

to speak and/or exhibit work there.<sup>7</sup> However, students' lives are often so filled with extracurricular activities and demanding school work that they decide not to attend. As a teacher of first-year students, Schmidt's syllabus indicates she sees it as her responsibility to introduce students to such lectures and exhibits in an effort to encourage future participation.

The plan for this course is rigorous. Most of the students in a first-year composition course would not be accustomed to the amount of reading assigned, nor would they be accustomed to the required "outside" events. Many may think of film as something that entertains exclusively; some will resist studying it. And although the syllabus presents the course as rigorous in terms of the reading types and amount, it is unclear from the syllabus what is expected in terms of writing. Schmidt writes,

**This is a writing intensive course**, with a portfolio and four papers. I will distribute the prompts for the portfolio entries usually in the class period preceding the due date (if the portfolio entry is due on Wednesday, I will distribute the prompt on the preceding Monday). Portfolio entries cannot be made up (no exceptions), but missing **one** will not affect your grade. Each additional missing entry, however, gets 0 points. (1, emphasis retained)

Aside from the standard academic integrity clause that comes a few pages later, this is the only mention that writing receives on the syllabus. Schmidt highlights in bold the phrase "This is a writing intensive course" to stress its importance. However, the phrase "writing intensive" is more typically applied at DePauw to sophomore-level W courses which are, in fact, content

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<sup>7</sup> A small sampling of the speakers/artists who visited DePauw's campus in the Fall 2006 semester include poet Eugene Gloria, artist Eric Sall, theologian John Haught, ethicist George Weigel, essayist Scott Russell Sanders, political advisor Lee Hamilton, news reporter John McWethy, film studies scholar David Bordwell, biologist E.O. Wilson, best-selling author Mitch Albom, and Women's Studies theorist Carol Gilligan. In 2007, bell hooks spent a week in residence.

courses with a greater emphasis on writing. For example, Literature and Interpretation, a required course for both the English Writing and English Literature majors and a popular choice to satisfy the general education requirement related to literature, may be taught either as a course that meets the W competence requirement – in which case it is “writing intensive” and instructors must assign a minimum number of pages, require revision, and incorporate discussions about composing writing assignments into class discussion – or as a non-W course in which case instructors might not assign writing at all (though most do).

As described on this syllabus, Schmidt’s course will meet the requirements of the College Writing II guidelines (in terms of number of pages assigned, emphasis on revision, etc.) but it fails to capture the sense that College Writing II is fundamentally a composition course (a course with a primary focus on the teaching of writing), not just a writing intensive one (which approaches a disciplinary subject with and through writing). In other words, the way the course is presented in the syllabus suggests that it is primarily a course in which students will learn to read and analyze texts with a secondary emphasis on crafting that analysis in writing. In their chapter on “Cultural Studies and Composition,” George and Trimbur note that the focus on cultural texts often leads teachers to forget about the writing. Drawing on criticisms leveled by others in the field, they write, “The problem, as [Gary] Tate sees it, is that the desire to find a ‘content’ for composition can all too easily lead to the neglect of writing” (84). Though Schmidt did not neglect writing in the classroom, neither does her syllabus suggest that writing is the center of the course.

Schmidt assigned two types of writing: short response papers (which she called “portfolio entries”) and more formal, argumentative essays of various length (usually in the 4-5 page range). Schmidt distributed essay prompts to students about a week prior to an assignment’s due

date. This move reflects her sense that assignments ought to address that which students bring to the table and find relevant and interesting during class discussion. In three of the four major papers assigned, Schmidt stressed the importance of a thesis. On the first assignment prompt, distributed September 1, 2006, Schmidt writes, “Your paper should have an introduction in which you anchor the thesis or central proposition.” Later, Schmidt consistently reminded students that “no matter how specific and expert your audience may be, the only reason to submit an article or essay is to present an idea that your audience has never considered in *quite the way you present it*” (Paper 1 editing sheet, emphasis retained). In addition to drawing on cultural studies pedagogy, Schmidt emphasizes the development of sound and unique arguments. This emphasis on thesis and argument is central to many different writing pedagogies.

Although many of the instructors of College Writing II emphasize thesis-driven writing, it is by no means the expectation of the program that this is the case. However, the program’s guidelines (excerpted below) do emphasize – by listing first – types of writing most commonly associated with traditional expository writing courses. Nonetheless, the WPCC Instructional Guidelines do not specifically state that thesis-driven writing is the preferred mode:

Diverse types of assignments are recommended. Informal, non-evaluated in-class writing is encouraged. Appropriate assignments include:

- essays introducing various kinds of rhetorical strategies, including argument, exposition, narration and attention to appropriate audiences.
- some form of evaluated in-class writing.
- a library project and appropriate training in the use of documented sources.

Although the “portfolio entries” that Schmidt assigned had a less formal, more exploratory nature to them, three of the four heavily weighted assignments asked for a similar argumentative strategy.

While the WPCC guidelines do not specifically state that revision (or any type of sequenced assignments) is required, they hint at such an expectation (“By the end of the course students should ...demonstrate flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing and proof-reading”). To that end, Schmidt did require that drafts of the major essays be brought to class approximately one week before the final versions were due. The word “revision” does not appear on her syllabus, but Schmidt did ask students to read and respond to one another’s drafts.

Peer response was the primary way that Schmidt foregrounded student writing in her classroom. Four times during the semester, students exchanged papers with a peer in order to receive feedback about their work. On the first peer response day, Schmidt distributed a “paper editing handout” that instructed students to “make three concrete, constructive suggestions for revision and write them on the draft.” Later in the semester, on two separate occasions, Schmidt asked students to volunteer to have the class read and “workshop” their papers.

Schmidt’s College Writing II course is undoubtedly challenging. The course reading list alone is ambitious, but the additional expectations that students participate in the film series, lecture series, and art opening make this course a demanding one.

But while the reading list – or content list – was so full and ambitious, Schmidt’s expectations in terms of writing were more modest and offered little variety. Three of the four essays asked students to write thesis-driven papers, and two of those papers were based on book-length, first-person narratives.<sup>8</sup> Although students did write about the poetry reading they

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<sup>8</sup> Students did not, in fact, have to “make connections” between books and films in their formal essays.

attended and a film they viewed in the portfolio entries, these events seemed to mostly serve as material for class discussions rather than as material to work with in writing.

On the other hand, students seemed genuinely engaged in the assigned readings and films. On the whole, they were well-prepared for class and engaged in lively discussions. As the course progressed, Schmidt focused on student writing more frequently during class meetings (e.g. workshops on thesis statements, draft exchanges, etc.). Schmidt's is a course that asks students to read and write; however, the emphasis was frequently on the reading which is problematic given that this is the only composition course that students will take.

### **2.2.2 Gary Davis's Course**

Gary Davis is also an Assistant Professor; he joined DePauw's English Department in the Fall 2003 after completing his PhD in English with an emphasis in American Literature. As a tenure-track faculty member, Davis usually teaches one section of College Writing II each year. Other courses he teaches regularly include American Writers, Native American Literature, American Gothic, Literature and Interpretation, and topics courses (first-year seminars, Honor Scholar seminars) on cannibalism and narrative, and hypertext and gaming.

Davis's syllabus, though in some ways much briefer, offers a more detailed look at the work students will do during the semester. Davis taught a similar version of this course during the Spring 2006 semester. His course draws on works fundamental to his training as an Americanist – texts by Dickinson, Hemingway, Emerson, Douglass, and Faulkner – and on other canonical texts by Montaigne, Woolf, and Eliot and more recently important texts including one by Gloria Anzaldua.



In terms of now standard composition taxonomies, the course is probably most adequately described as a “modes” or a “genre” course that assumes learning comes through repetition. Students read haiku and then wrote a series of linked haiku; they read Montaigne’s essays and then wrote their own essays on taboo subjects; they read *As I Lay Dying* and then wrote internal monologues. This type of course has a loose connection to so-called current-traditional composition models. Sharon Crowley explains that “Students were taught current-traditional principles of discourse through teachers’ analyses of professional examples, and they were then expected to compose paragraphs and essays that displayed their observance of those principles” (94). What distances Davis’s course from a current-traditional one is both that he asked students to analyze the assigned “professional” readings for themselves and that students imitated genres besides the essay. The following description of the interconnectedness of the course’s reading and writing assignments suggests the strong ties Davis sees between reading and writing:

We will survey four distinct genres: poetry, essay, short fiction, and experimental nonfiction. In a series of short assignments, we will practice the techniques demonstrated in these various genres, and then, in a composite portfolio, synthesize these techniques in a longer nonfiction essay that will represent the culmination of your writing in the course, a work of sustained interest and personal investment. (Davis 1)

Elsewhere in the syllabus, Davis suggests that there are three main writing concerns to which students will attend: word choice, vocabulary, phrasing; argumentation, inquiry; perspective, voice, characterization. These emphases, again, have roots in current-traditional composition models.

Davis's assignments provided a great deal of variation and the inclusion of eight class sessions – one every other week – that were devoted solely to student writing suggests that Davis also draws on theories and practices of process pedagogies. Davis did not emphasize “revision” either on the syllabus or during class time, but he devoted much class time to collaboration toward revision. In his syllabus he writes, “Writing at the professional level requires making good use of the criticism that informed readers provide and, in turn, giving useful criticism to others. Most often, good writing is not produced individually, but through a collaboration of writers, readers, and editors” (Davis 2). Davis scheduled the eight writing workshop days to engage students in the process of offering and receiving feedback. On workshop days, class sessions were devoted exclusively to the entire class talking about student writing. Each student's paper was workshopped at least once, and they had the opportunity to make changes to that paper after receiving feedback from classmates.

While Davis's pedagogy is a mixed bag of older and newer, it is by no means an uninformed pedagogy. Davis's goal in this class, as stated on his syllabus, is to equip students with the ability to be versatile as writers:

Fundamentally, this course will help you to develop the skills necessary to write effectively in an academic or professional environment: invention, organization of ideas, drafting, and revising. In addition, we will seek to overcome the notion that academic writing is necessarily uncreative or uninspired by helping you to develop a controlled but unique and versatile writing style adaptable to any discipline. (Davis 1)

The nature of Davis's assignments suggests that versatility does not come from the ability to craft a thesis alone. Rather, careful choice of words, inquiry, and description are all a part of the

mix in this class. Moreover, as Rebecca Moore Howard suggests in “Collaborative Pedagogy,” the writing workshop – or any collaborative strategy – can teach versatility because when teachers “are guiding students in the collaborative process of discovering and constructing knowledge, students are empowered” (57). Davis’s syllabus suggests that he sees College Writing II as a course that ought to empower students to write effectively for a wide array of situations.

For the final assignment in Davis’s class, students chose a subject that interested them academically and/or personally. They composed this extended paper in three parts due throughout the semester; students began this assignment, referred to as the “portfolio project,” in September, wrote a second part in October, and a third in November. The final project – a synthesis and revision of the first three – is neither argument, nor narrative, nor description. It is all three at once.

Davis described the portfolio as “a sustained project that [...] demonstrates your growth and versatility as a writer and includes, as its centerpiece, your most substantial, complex, and original piece of work” (Davis 5). To help students imagine this kind of text, Davis assigned two readings he considered models for this “composite essay”: James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Gloria Anzaluda’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Again, the language Davis uses in the syllabus suggests that students are to pattern their work after these texts: “Like Agee and Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the fourth part of your portfolio will represent a composite work, demanding the broader skill to synthesize these various techniques in an extended nonfiction essay” (Davis 5).

Davis’s attention to student writing in the classroom is the most impressive part of this course. In addition to the workshops, he frequently asked students to write during class time. The

in-class writing was meant to prepare students for the rather unconventional assignments he asked them to write. For example, in preparation for writing their photographic essays, Davis first drew students' attention to a photograph of boots in *Not Let Us Praise Famous Men*. The class discussed how the photograph and narrative about it were fundamentally interconnected. Davis then projected a collage of various types of footwear onto the overhead projector and asked students to choose one of the pairs of shoes/boots/slippers, etc. and write about it in a style similar to Agee and Evans's.

Like Schmidt, Davis assigned a great deal of reading, so much so that students told me they did not keep up with it. Unlike in Schmidt's class, where students had to write *about* the texts they read, in Davis's class, students were not really accountable for the readings since they had to *model* them rather than *engage* with them. Davis also assigned more writing than Schmidt did, so I suspect that many students read only enough to get a sense of how to model the assigned text before they began to write. This meant that Davis talked/lectured more than he seemed to want and students were largely quiet during class time. But even though Davis assigned a great deal of reading, I would say that because he also demanded so much writing that his course was, fundamentally, a composition course.

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As the descriptions above indicate, Gary Davis and Carla Schmidt teach vastly different versions of College Writing II. To some extent, both Schmidt and Davis see College Writing II as a service course. Because this is the first of two courses in the writing requirement, and because the second course will likely be taken in a discipline other than English, each teacher focuses on an aspect of writing he or she thinks will be most easily applied to another writing situation. For Schmidt, crafting effective, interesting and unique thesis statements is that thing

which is most applicable to other disciplines. For Davis, teaching students to be “versatile” is key.

My description of their courses – drawn largely from their syllabi – draws attention to some of the peculiarities of the courses, to some of their strengths and to some of their limitations. And while a syllabus is not the course itself, Lisa Ede argues that “course descriptions can be revealing documents. What instructors choose to say, or not say, can expose underlying assumptions they bring to their courses” (*Situating Composition* 88). On the other hand, Ede also notes that while syllabi may expose instructors’ biases, “even the most carefully developed course description is, after all, a prediction” (88). Thus, though Schmidt’s syllabus may suggest to an outsider that writing is not central to the course, as an observer in the class, I witnessed how student writing was, in fact, the center of many sessions, particularly as the semester progressed. And while Davis’s syllabus may seem too concerned with replication and not concerned enough with invention, no one who read the students’ papers during workshop would accuse Davis of failing to capture students’ imagination and attention.

As I will discuss later in relation to particular students and their writing, both Schmidt and Davis carefully crafted comments on each student’s work. Both also required conferences with students and were available for additional, un-required visits. Both respect their students and value their ideas and their efforts.

### **2.3 RESPONSES FROM CLASSROOM PEERS**

The students who participated in my study received feedback about their writing from many sources. Teachers, classroom peers and writing center peer tutors were frequent readers, but

some students also turned to parents (via email), roommates, and older students. I will discuss the effects of receiving feedback from multiple sources in Chapter Five. The remainder of this chapter explores the feedback students in my study received from classroom peers.

Teachers design peer response activities for many reasons. Some are committed to teaching writing as a process – especially as a social one – and ask students to trade drafts in order to highlight the collaborative nature writing can have. Other teachers use writing to establish, in the words of Anne Ruggles Gere, “the ‘otherness’ of the audience” so that students might “respond to this otherness by searching for more effective ways to convey ideas” (Gere 68). Still others assume that students benefit from receiving any kind of feedback, especially if they incorporate it into revisions of their work.

Because mine is a study primarily concerned with the role that feedback from a specific reader – a peer tutor – plays in students’ revision processes, I have to consider the limitations of that type of reader. Perhaps the most obvious limitation is that a peer tutor will not necessarily be – in fact, will most often not be – familiar with the material about which students are writing or the classroom talk that I described at the beginning of this chapter. Thus, one advantage that a classroom peer holds over a peer tutor is that they are more familiar with – or at least ought to be more familiar with – the material about which students are writing and context in which the writing has been assigned. Some composition textbooks specifically draw attention to classroom peers’ strengths on this count. In her textbook *Work in Progress*, Lisa Ede writes, “If you have been getting responses to your writing from fellow students, you know how helpful their reactions and advice can be. [...]. Because your classmates know your instructor and the assignment as insiders, they can provide particularly effective responses to your writing” (291).

As I alluded to in my descriptions of the two teachers and syllabi, Schmidt and Davis engaged students in different types of peer response. Schmidt asked students to exchange drafts and comment on one other peer's draft each time she assigned a major paper. Students therefore received feedback from a classroom peer about every paper they wrote. In contrast, the students in Davis's class distributed one of their assignments to the entire class once during the semester. They received feedback from the entire class about that paper, but received no feedback from classroom peers about their other seven papers (unless, of course, they voluntarily exchanged drafts outside of class).

Suffice it to say that different methods of peer response have different benefits and different drawbacks. The purpose of this chapter is not to compare the peer response methods or to extensively compare peer response to peer tutoring (which will be the subject of the next three chapters). Instead, I explore a few instances of classroom peer response to provide a sense of what the students in the classrooms I observed valued about writing and what they focused on when they responded to their classmates' writing.

Most of the students who responded to my questionnaire indicated that during high school they received feedback about their writing and the most common source of feedback was "a single peer from class" (52/86 or about 60%). Many of the students in the College Writing II classrooms I observed had participated in the kind of draft exchange they experienced in Schmidt's class; the workshop model Davis used was likely less familiar. Several students' narrative responses about the feedback they received suggest that some students feel ambivalent about the usefulness of exchanging drafts with peers. For example, one student wrote "Teachers and parents commented on the syntax while peers mainly noted mechanical errors." While this statement is not overtly critical of peers' feedback, her comment indicates that peers focus on

something different than what teachers, in particular, note. Another student wrote, “If they had suggestions (which was not always the case), my editor would usually suggest a content revision.” This student’s comment suggests that peers may, in fact, struggle to come up with feedback to offer.

A few other comments make similar disclaimers about the usefulness of feedback, but on the whole, students indicated that they did, in fact, receive various kinds of feedback that helped them as they worked toward a final draft.

In the pages that follow, I turn to several instances of classroom-based peer response in order to offer a sense of how students engaged in giving feedback to one another. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this data because this is a chapter that developed in the process of writing my dissertation. When I designed this study, I had not planned to focus on classroom peers’ responses. I did not have permission to – nor did I plan to – record peer response sessions in the classroom. Therefore, the data I have from peer response in Schmidt’s class consists only of the comments the responders of the five case study participants wrote on their papers. Students were allowed time to converse with one another about their papers and I have no record of those conversations; the comments probably served as a rough guide from which they talked.

In Davis’s class, students provided oral comments to one another in workshops. Again, I did not obtain permission to audio-record these workshops so in my discussion I have drawn on the field notes I took during the workshops.

The data presented in the following pages allows me to make observations about the kinds of feedback classroom peers tended to offer during peer response activities and to suggest the benefits and limitations of this kind of work. Based on my observations from this study and in my own teaching, I think that classroom peer response can be effective. However, I think that



just as peer tutors – and even new teachers of writing – require training in order to effectively respond to students’ work, classroom students who are asked to respond to one another’s writing need direct instruction about providing feedback, and then they need feedback about the quality of the feedback they’ve provided.

### **2.3.1 Draft Exchange**

Like many first-year college students, Rachel, one of my case study students, wondered early in the first semester if she fit in at her chosen college. By the end of the first semester, she had decided to transfer to a state university closer to her home in Michigan at the end of the year. Many factors surely affected her decision to transfer, but her experience in College Writing II was a largely positive one. Thinking back on the course toward the end of her first-year, Rachel said, “I learned a lot of important things in College Writing II. I learned to think more abstractly and to not be afraid that my ideas were too ‘out there.’ I learned that you don’t always have to like or agree with everything you read, and it is ok to admit if there is something you don’t understand.” When I asked her if she would have to retake a first-year composition course at her new school, Rachel replied, “I don’t have to retake the freshmen writing course, because College Writing II transferred. Although I wouldn’t really mind retaking it! It was a very useful and interesting class.”

At the beginning of her first semester, Rachel seemed timid as a writer. Although she took rigorous English courses in high school – AP Composition and AP Writing – that required 3-5 page papers “every couple of weeks,” Rachel said, “I struggle a lot with thinking of new ideas. I tend to reiterate the same point a lot in papers. It’s hard for me to come up with new ideas.” When I asked her what she expected of writing courses in college, she said, “I just hope

they'll improve my writing since I do want to be an English teacher." After a moment, she added, "I need to know how to be a good writer and I wouldn't say I am right now, but I have the potential." To look at Rachel's portfolio of writing suggests that the potential is there, but consistency is not.

At various times throughout the semester when I arranged to interview Rachel, she had to cancel or reschedule because of conflicts with her work-study job. She came to the writing center once during the fall semester even though she had hoped to use the center more often. Around mid-term of the fall semester, I asked her why she hadn't used the writing center to that point. She said, "I have wanted to come but I've had so much going on. That's why I want to make an appointment now before I get anything else scheduled." When I checked in with Rachel at the end of the second semester, she told me that during the second semester she took two courses that required significant writing – a history course and a religious studies course – and that "I have been to the writing center a couple of times this semester, just to make sure I was keeping up with everything I learned in College Writing."

Rachel was enrolled in Carla Schmidt's section of College Writing. One of the first essays students read in class was Dorothy Allison's "What Did You Expect?" which deals with the expectations Allison thinks others have of her as a writer. Some expect her to be blonder, others taller, older or younger, she recalls (74). In her essay, Allison grapples with the disparity she believes exists between what others – college students, inn keepers, photographers, readers – expect of her and who she knows she is: "a 48-year-old woman" who has "mostly worked at desk jobs, hasn't given birth to children or had cancer yet, and sees a dentist fairly regularly" (74). She rejects fantastic representations of herself – namely being photographed "sprinkled

with powdered sugar” (71) – preferring to represent herself in this essay more quietly, more truthfully.

For their first written assignment, many students chose to work with Allison’s essay by responding to the following topic (one of two options given):

In her personal essay “What Did You Expect?” (Convergences 71), Dorothy Allison rejects being represented as a cliché. Write an essay in which you discuss Allison’s representation of herself in “What Did You Expect.”

This assignment seems fairly straightforward: students are to analyze a single text and to focus on the way that Allison represents herself in the assigned essay. However, the assignment actually poses a fair challenge because throughout the essay, Allison identifies the representations of herself that she rejects, but she does not explicitly address how she sees herself. Thus, students who responded to this topic had to suggest how Allison represents herself by first considering why Allison rejects the representations she addresses in her essay.

The representation that Allison most objects to is the one suggested by a professional photographer whose “pictures appear in major magazines” (Allison 71). Each time she calls, the photographer suggests shooting Allison “sprinkled with powdered sugar,” apparently because of “all that food and southern cooking” that appears in Allison’s writing (71). Perhaps because this example opens Allison’s essay, it is one that many of the students in my study referenced as they attempted to assert Allison’s representation of herself. Rachel’s paper begins,

When the photographer first called Dorothy Allison to request a photo shoot, she had many ideas in which she would like Allison to be portrayed. Her favorite was a picture of Allison sprinkled with powdered sugar; a “real” portrayal

of Allison's southern heritage. Although she is from the south, she does not believe that where she comes from necessarily effects who she is as a person.

Rachel's paper begins with an assertion about the representation Allison most rejects. Rachel does not make her own claim about how Allison represents herself but instead sets up the idea that Allison works to reject stereotypes associated with the South and southerners. This idea resurfaces at various points throughout Rachel's draft. In the sixth paragraph, she claims that Allison is "perplexed" by the photographer's powdered sugar idea because "although [Allison] grew up in a poor, southern family, she has done all she could to differentiate herself from the poor, southern stereotype." What isn't clear – in terms of the photographer's request and Rachel's analysis of it – is how the proposed sugary pose suggests Allison's poor southern background. If anything, the image of a woman covered in powdered sugar suggests excess and richness, a "sweet life." Rachel's underdeveloped analysis leaves me unconvinced of this episode's significance.

It's not until the third paragraph that Rachel addresses how Allison does represent herself. Here, Rachel asserts that "Allison has two representations of herself. One is the way she would like to be portrayed; a strong, confident woman who doesn't need approval from anyone or anything." Several paragraphs later, Rachel introduces Allison's second representation of herself: "Allison's main representation of herself would be that she is not what people would expect her to be." Again, it seems that the representations Rachel thinks Allison most rejects have to do with her southern upbringing. Rachel claims that Allison is "breaking away from the southern woman stereotype" when she refuses to wear "curlers in her hair" and to apply "a heavy amount of makeup." Allison also attends college because she wanted to "become someone different and completely unexpected."

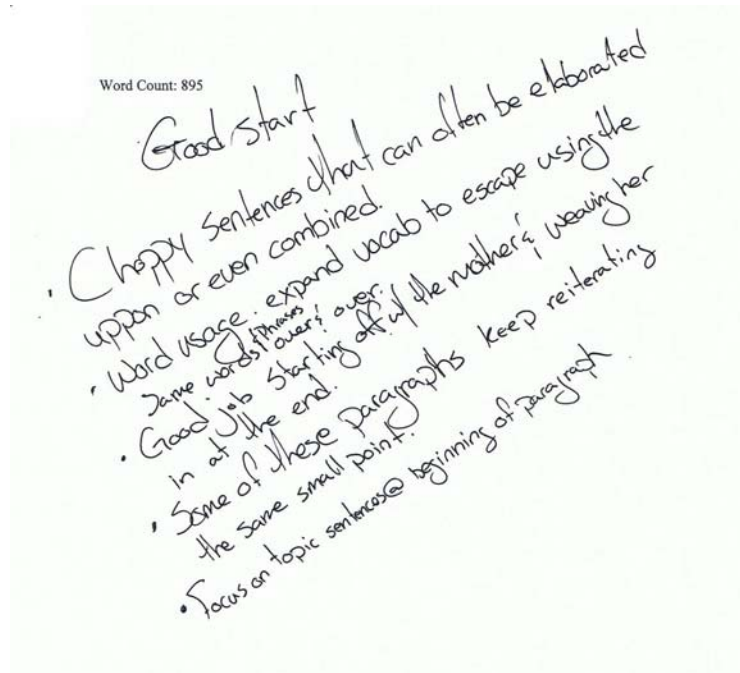
In this three page draft, Rachel includes eleven quotations from Allison's essay. She integrates these quotes well and usually attempts to analyze or explain their relevance. In the paper's final paragraph, Rachel makes what I think is her most impressive point. She realizes that although Allison wants to be a person who does not need others' approval, "the fact that Allison still feels somewhat self-conscious when being interviewed or having her picture taken shows that she hasn't quite become her vision of an ideal woman." Rachel's comment is both insightful and supported by examples Allison gives throughout her essay. But despite some very impressive interpretive moments, the paper is unfocused largely because Rachel jumps between several ideas that receive equal attention (in terms of paragraphs devoted to them): the rejection of being photographed with powdered sugar; Allison's southern background; and Allison's conscious decision to not act like her mother.

When students brought their drafts to class on September 4, a week before the final paper was due, Schmidt distributed a peer response handout that included suggestions for making comments about other students' writing. Schmidt cautioned, "It takes a while before you become a good peer-reader. But, a good writer learns to read their own and others' writing well." She also reiterated a point she made earlier, that it is "difficult to read your own words and not what you *intended* to say." Before letting students get to work, Schmidt instructed them to "Make concrete suggestions" and "write on the draft in the blank spaces."

Rachel and Michael exchanged drafts and they, like the other members of the class, took significant time to read one another's papers. Students began this response activity at 10:25 AM and were still silently reading twenty-five minutes later, though some students had begun to write comments. About thirty minutes into class, Schmidt said, "You know you can talk? We're not in church, right?" Then the whole room erupted. I heard some students asking questions of

one another while others approached this portion of the response by giving comments one person at a time.

I do not have a record of what Rachel and Michael discussed verbally during the peer response activity. However, Michael did write a number of comments on Rachel's paper, both in the margins and at the end. The comments at the end seem to summarize his sense of the strengths and weaknesses of Rachel's draft. He writes:



**Figure 4.** Michael's Summary Comments on Rachel's Draft

What's interesting about this list is that most of what Michael offers starts with a lower-order concern – choppy sentences, word usage, and topic sentence – that ultimately points to higher-order concern. For example, Michael notes that Rachel uses the same words and phrases over and over which is, on the surface, a lower-order concern. But what Michael is actually noting is not only that Rachel tends to use the same words but that, as Michael notes later, she keeps “reiterating the same small point” which is a sign that she needs to develop many of her points more thoroughly.

The comments Michael makes within the paper direct Rachel's attention to specific moments where, for example, her paper might be aided by further examples and moments where her "elaboration" is sufficient. Next to this sentence – "Although they share some similar physical characteristics, like their hips and smile, Allison and her mother are two very different people" – Michael writes, "Elaboration – Good!"

On the other hand, next to Rachel's assertion that, "When someone thinks of a famous author, they generally do not picture an unkempt lesbian. Allison uses her looks in a more profound way by choosing not to fit the clichéd image of a famous author," Michael notes that Rachel needs to develop her point more thoroughly. "Example? Elaboration?" he writes.

In this passage, Rachel moves away from the text itself to a more general and abstract claim: she does not address what people expect of Allison, rather, she addresses what people expect of authors in general and goes so far as to suggest what "these people" do and don't expect. Michael's comment, therefore, may be meant to point Rachel back to the specific examples Allison presents in her essay. In it, Allison describes how an innkeeper sizes her up when she attempts to check in. He asks her, "You're Ms. Allison, the writer?" and Allison suggests that his impression that she doesn't belong in his inn is based on her "comfortable shoes and loose rayon trousers, the carry-on suitcase with broken zippers" (73), all shabby accessories. Drawing on this scene would allow Rachel to speak specifically about the expectations Allison suspects others have of her. And while it is true that Michael does not draw her attention specifically to this scene, it seems possible that his comment is meant to direct her back to her source.

Michael's comments on Rachel's paper accord with some of the questionnaire findings I discussed in Chapter 1. Although Michael's written comments do not prioritize the changes he

thinks Rachel needs to make, his comments do reflect that he has attended to and offered feedback about a range of problem-areas. While some of his comments do relate to word-level issues, others draw Rachel's attention to moments where she needs to think further about Allison's representation of herself before she will be able to rewrite those sections that suffer from "reiteration" or vagueness. It does not seem that Michael places "symbolic importance on [the] selection and rejection of words as the determiners of success or failure" (Sommers 381). Michael's comments are fairly sophisticated, especially given that this is the first peer response of the semester. His comments are surely influenced by Schmidt's handout that instructed students to offer comments about the introduction, transitions/topic sentences, organization, development and conclusion. Michael tells Rachel that she should "expand vocab," eliminate choppy sentences, and elaborate on quotations, all of which address Schmidt's direction to show the writer where she's "repetitive" and underdeveloped (though Schmidt's instructions had more to do with the development of arguments). Nonetheless, it seems that Michael's feedback mimics the institutional discourse that Schmidt set up in her extensive handout.

On the other hand, the assumption that underlies the language of some composition textbooks – that the classroom peer readers have an advantage over writing center peer tutor when it comes to responding to student work because they are familiar with the texts about which students are writing and with the classroom culture (as it relates to a teacher's expectations or shared language – e.g. "over-arching thesis") – is called into question by the exchange documented in Michael's comments on Rachel's paper. Granted, I do not have a record of what they said to one another, but the comments written on Rachel's paper pertain mostly to what she has already written (rather than, say, a sense of what the paper could accomplish or to the "possibility" revision presents). There is little indication that Michael has considered how



Rachel might specifically return to Allison's text as she considers the claims she has made. Nor does Michael comment specifically about Rachel's thesis statement, a component of the essay Schmidt prioritized in her comments.

All of this is not to say that Michael's comments were unhelpful. On the contrary, they seemed to give Rachel a "heightened sense of audience" (Howard 60) that allows her to revise her paper in a way that emphasizes the point she raised late in her paper: that Allison's self-consciousness around interviewers and photographers reveals that she "hasn't quite become her vision of an ideal woman." This idea is more pronounced early on in the revised version of Rachel's paper. The following excerpts are versions of the third paragraph from the draft and revision:

#### Draft

In "What Did You Expect," Allison has two representations of herself. One is the way she would like to be portrayed; a strong, confident woman who doesn't need approval from anyone or anything. For a while, Allison tried to convince herself that she was this woman. However, she is not someone who could care less what anyone thinks about her. She does still get self-conscious while be photographed or answering questions. But she did not become her mother, who couldn't even leave the house without applying a heavy amount of makeup and curling her hair. Although they share some similar physical characteristics, like their hips and smile, Allison and her mother are two very different people. She tried very hard to prove this in her personal essay.

#### Revision

In "What Did You Expect," Allison has two representations of herself. One representation is how she would like to be portrayed; a strong, confident woman who doesn't need approval from anyone or anything. *She didn't want to become her mother, who couldn't face the world without first applying her "war paint" (Allison 76).* For a while, Allison tried to convince herself that she was this *amazingly self-confident woman. However, she said herself that she "failed of course" (Allison 77).* She still gets self-conscious during photo shoots or while answering questions. But she did not become her mother, who couldn't even leave the house without applying a heavy amount of makeup and curling her hair. Although they share some similar physical characteristics, like their hips and

smile, Allison and her mother are two very different people. *Allison never felt, and still never feels, the need to put on a façade before appearing in public.*

Though much of the original paragraph remains in the revision, the changes (italicized) Rachel does make clarify her logic and reasoning. In the draft, Rachel asserts that Allison portrays herself as “a strong, confident woman” but that she is not, ultimately, someone who “could care less what anyone thinks about her.” These ideas remain present in the revision, but what develops there is a clearer sense of why Allison’s mother is important to Allison’s sense of herself. In the draft, Allison’s mother isn’t mentioned until about midway through the paragraph, and her arrival is marked with a strong “But.” This sentence – “But she did not become her mother...” – seems abrupt; the paragraph’s focus is blurred. “Why,” a reader might ask, “is Rachel introducing Allison’s mother now?”

In the revision, Rachel introduces Allison’s mother much earlier and does so in a way that suggests that Allison’s mother is the opposite of what Allison wants to be: whereas her mother “couldn’t face the world without first applying her ‘war paint,’” Allison attempts to be strong and confident; whereas her mother is never comfortable in her own skin, Allison refuses to wear the make-up she associates with her mother’s insecurity thereby attempting to assert her own self-confidence. But Rachel shows us that Allison’s façade was as real as her mother’s because Allison herself admits she fails. Now when readers arrive at Rachel’s sentence “But she did not become her mother...,” they see that Rachel means to suggest that although Allison might not have all the self-confidence that she wants to have, she still has more of it than her mother – who never left the house “without applying a heavy amount of makeup and curling her hair” – did.

Michael made few specific comments in this paragraph, but Rachel's revision of it does suggest her attempt to focus the paragraph around a topic sentence (arguably the second sentence of this paragraph). She also adds textual evidence to illustrate Allison's mindset toward her mother's behaviors and her own. A number of the sentences early in the paragraph still seem choppy, or perhaps unnecessarily wordy (phrases like "one representation is how she" and "She still gets") but as the paragraph builds, the sentences become somewhat smoother with fewer extraneous words. It seems, then, that rather than attending to only those things that Michael pointed to specifically in the margins of her paper, Rachel attempted to apply some of his overall comments to her whole paper.

### **2.3.2 Writing Workshops**

The members of Gary Davis's section of College Writing II were generally quiet. Ken was one of a few exceptions. He usually arrived before other students and has his laptop<sup>9</sup> open and playing a song downloaded from i-tunes as the other students walked in. Ken came to DePauw from rural Missouri and played a varsity sport during the fall semester, was involved in an information technology program, and hoped to attend medical school after graduation. As the fall semester progressed, Ken seemed increasingly stressed by his workload. At one point, he considered dropping calculus because he failed his first two exams. He stayed in the class and

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<sup>9</sup> Beginning in the Fall 2005, all DePauw students were required to purchase laptop computers through the Laptop Initiative. Many professors write policies about laptops – e.g. students can bring them to class only on certain days – but others, like Davis, encourage students to use them to take notes during class on almost any day.

ultimately passed, though he indicated that work in his other classes surely suffered because of the extra effort he had to put into calculus.

In Davis's class, Ken did well. Unlike many of his peers' high schools, Ken's did not offer honors English or Advanced Placement. He frankly told me, "The only courses that I did a lot of writing in were the English courses and me saying 'a lot' right now is not a lot compared to what I'm doing now in college." The most writing intensive class Ken took – his senior English class – required only a 2-3 page paper every month. Those papers were rigidly structured; he was expected to write in the five paragraph format. Ken clearly felt stifled by this structure, and also expressed frustration about grading:

One of the problems I had with writing in high school is that if I wrote something and I spent a lot of time on it and concentrated really hard, I felt like I didn't really get a lot out of doing that, you know, and that was really disappointing for me with a lot of the things I did. I would do all this and I would get like, ah, you know, an 89. And the next time I would do it the night before and I would get the same score. It just didn't seem like the hard work paid off.

But Ken's story of writing in high school was not all bad. One of his assignments was to write a Spenserian sonnet. Ken's teacher encouraged him to submit it to a writing contest and Ken's was one selected to be published in the contest's journal.

Ken seemed to work hard for Davis's composition course and, for the most part, he told me felt that when he worked hard on an assignment, it paid off. Ken was one of only two students to have a paper work-shopped more than once. During our second interview, he told me he volunteered to have a second paper work-shopped because he thought he would benefit from the extra feedback. As a writer, Ken often struggled to express his thoughts in a logical, clear

way. However, his writing was always interesting, always provocative, and always a little different than everyone else's. Ken knew this was among his strengths as a writer: "I think that I have a unique way of looking at things, and I kind of realized that things I see that occurred to me right off the bat strike others as 'whoa!'" For example, when students wrote internal monologues, Ken chose to write his from the perspective of a teenaged girl. When students had to write an essay in Montaigne's style, interrogating a societal norm, Ken chose to write on the "male thong" and the stigma attached to it. Ken's papers were nothing if not unique.

Ken's internal monologue was work-shopped by his classmates on November 3. Like most of the assignments in Davis's class, this assignment asked students to model techniques they observed in the material they had just read. Students read William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and were asked to complete the following assignment:

Just as you have practiced Hemingway's techniques of characterization, practice Faulkner's style of internal monologue, as he demonstrates it in *As I Lay Dying*. While you assumed an external perspective in the previous assignment, you should now place yourself, as writer, within a character's consciousness or unconsciousness. [...]. Follow Faulkner's example of neologism, association, and use of images of dreamlike intensity in order to plumb the inner world of someone whom we would otherwise know only superficially.

Davis's prompt refers to the previous assignment students completed, a character sketch in Hemingway's style. In that paper, Ken sketched a nanny who was the primary caretaker for a young boy. Thus, Ken's decision to write a monologue from the perspective of a teenaged girl is in keeping with his exploration of young women and their characters.

In his paper, “A New Homecoming,” Ken explores the way this teenaged girl deals with an abusive relationship. The internal monologue opens with the unnamed girl waking up early. She thinks, “I try to move quietly as I exit the bed, so as not to wake Steve. Steeeve, I know he loves me; I also know how grumpy he can get in the mornings. I better get everything ready before he wakes up.” Although this opening paragraph leaves the age of the main character unclear, Ken later includes details that make it clear she is in high school:

Good thing it wasn’t raining yesterday with the homecoming parade and game and everything. I can’t believe that whore Brittney won homecoming Queen, she is like really beautiful [and] everything don’t get me wrong, but like I just know that rumor Frank told me about her with Kalip has to be true and like that is just wrong cheating on him like that I mean really.

These details reveal Ken’s perception of the immaturity of a high school girl’s mind. The monologue further reveals how the narrator and Steve are able to spend the night together: “Steve’s parents are out of town so we could stay at his house. He looked so sexy in his suit, ummmm.”

The opening paragraphs of this story have a somewhat creepy sense to them. Though the narrator claims to love Steve and that Steve loves her, some of her behaviors suggest that the relationship may be less than ideal underneath. For example, that she reveals he can be “grumpy” in the morning and that she must “get everything ready” suggests a more sinister side to their relationship. Moreover, the narrator seems preoccupied with making herself and Steve’s breakfast flawless, perhaps hinting that Steve demands perfection. As the narrator applies her make-up, she attempts to get “everything just right” and takes time to “cover the scars, and bruises” all the while telling herself that “Steve loves [her].” When she makes breakfast, she

again attempts to cook the bacon “just right, cook it just right” and covers the finished eggs, bacon, and toast with a plate so that they don’t get cold. Together, these behaviors and the narrator’s mindset suggest that Steve may, in fact, be responsible for the bruises and scars the narrator tries so hard to cover.

Steve’s only appearance in the piece comes when he wraps his arm around the narrator and whispers in her ear “why are you up so early?” He expresses gratitude to her for making his breakfast and concern over the fact that she is not eating with him.

It turns out that Steve is not the abusive man in the narrator’s life. When Steve drops her off at home, the narrator’s father – the person she thinks of as “the man who made me” – greets her by asking “where were you ugly slut[?]. . . I hope that boy of yours know what kind of situation he is getting into.” As the narrator runs to her room, she thinks, “don’t let him touch me. Please don’t let him touch me.” When she barricades herself in her room, she remembers the other woman in her family: “I hope mom is ok, probably not.” But exhausted by the previous day’s events, she falls asleep and dreams of a time in the future when she can “make a home with Steve.”

Ken’s paper is about three and a half pages long, a little longer than the suggested page length. Given the short length of this paper, it is difficult to imagine that a student could capture the kind of depth in a character that resembles Faulkner’s characterization. Nevertheless, Ken creates an interesting – though perhaps not convincing – persona in this assignment. The degree to which the narrator is convincing was the subject of many of his classmates’ comments during the workshop.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rather than recording class sessions and workshops, I simply took handwritten notes. Therefore, the included comments from students are paraphrases rather than direct quotes.

Kendra was the first student to point to moments where the voice of the teenaged girl breaks down. “I’m impressed that you tried to write from the perspective of a teenaged girl,” she tells Ken. But Kendra expressed some reservation about Ken’s word choice. In the scene where the narrator made breakfast, Ken wrote, “brake the eggs, pour them in the pan, watch them sizzle, they know how I feel...” and Kendra questioned how the narrator knows what it feels like to “sizzle” and what that means, exactly.

Similarly, Max thought Ken’s use of the sound “ummmm” – in the sentence “He looked so sexy in his suit, ummm” – seemed inauthentic. Max suggested adding a “y” or dropping the “u” to make the sound either “yummmm” or, simply, “mmmm.” Kimberly agreed with Max’s assessment of this issue and added that the drawn out phrasing of “Steeve” in the first paragraph seemed inconsistent with the narrator’s character. Denise also noted that when a woman puts her makeup on, she probably doesn’t think of the word “face” in quotation marks. Paula also noticed this problem and suggested using italics somehow in this section. On the other hand, Denise thought the sentence fragments were quite effective because, “I think in fragments so that works for me.”

The other issue about which students largely agreed was that Ken needed to add a transition between the breakfast scene and the car scene (when Steve takes the narrator home) and that the car scene itself seemed rushed. The scene unfolds after Steve has asked the narrator why she isn’t eating:

That gross smell no not for me, but what is that strange grumbling, its not coming from me. No, no it isn’t.

Steve and I are sitting in his car now, on my street he is dropping me off. I don’t ever want to leave this safe seat. I don’t ever want to leave his arms, but I



wont have to we will be like this forever because he loves me. That's what love is.

Isn't it?

Kendra suggested making it clearer that the narrator doesn't want to get out of the car, and Martha agreed that the scene "needs more development and a better transition into it." Like Martha, I find the transition here abrupt, owing in large part to the break away from internal voice. Ken announces the location change, disrupting the "interior" nature of the monologue.

As they respond to Ken's paper, the students in Davis's class largely attend to issues related to making the narrator's voice more authentic and to developing the character and some key moments more carefully. Charles, for example, noted that both in the car and when the narrator gets home, she needs to seem more nervous. A few students did note more "picky things" – as Christine called them – including run-on sentences which pervade the piece. Davis reminded students that this type of assignment "invites you to break the rules," but Greg maintained that some of the run-on sentences really interfered with readability. Overall, the comments students made reveal that they take seriously their role as peer readers, that they genuinely want to help Ken improve his paper, and that they prioritize issues relating to the character's believability.

Ken was very selective about the changes he made. Though he removed the quotation marks from the word "face" and changes "ummmm" to "mmmm yummy," he left unchanged the phrasing of "Steeve" and the reference to knowing how the bacon feels when it sizzles. Ken also wrote a smoother transition into the car scene, one that actually develops Steve's character a little further. Now, after refusing to eat and thinking about the "gross smell," the narrator's focus shifts back to Ken: "I watch him eat. He is soo cute when he eats." After Steve finishes his

breakfast, the narrator begins to clear the table, but Steve “stops [her] and tells [her] not to worry about it.” They dress and then Ken continues with the car scene.

Here, too, Ken made a small but important change. To the scene he added an additional sentence that reveals how safe the narrator feels with Steve and sets up a stark contrast to the hell she enters when she opens the door to her home:

Steve and I are sitting in his car now, on my street, he is dropping me off. I don't ever want to leave this safe seat. *So safe, the cold hard shell to protect and the warm embrace to give me comfort.* I don't ever want to leave his arms, but I *won't* have to. We will be like this forever because he loves me. That's what love is. Isn't it?

Although the first sentence of this paragraph remains jarring, the added italicized sentence returns to the narrator's mind and reinforces how she feels when she is with Steve. The new sentence directly addresses Martha's comments. Ken also reworked run-on sentences throughout the paper which increases their readability. For example, in this passage where the father speaks, the addition of sentence boundaries reflects the angry intonation and inflection these words:

Draft

“Good for nothing you'll never get anywhere you will end up just like you stupid mother, she is so worthless she can't get by without you dear old dad pulling the whole families dead weight.”

Revision

“Good for nothin. You'll never get anywhere. You'll end up just like your stupid mother. She is so worthless, she can't even get by without your dear old dad pulling the whole family's dead weight.”

In addition to the definition the periods provide, Ken also changes “nothing” to “nothin” which approximates the angry, slurred speech that would characterize the speech of one who “drank more than usual last night.”

The comments students made during this workshop provided a useful complication to Sommers’s critique of the word-level emphasis most students take toward revision. She found that students “concentrate on particular words apart from their role in the text” (38). Max, Kendra, Denise, Paula, and Kimberly – five of the thirteen students present for the workshop – commented heavily about the words Ken used. But all of their comments (discussed above) point to something more than the words themselves: they point to the way that Ken conceives of the character whose mind he is attempting to “plumb.” In other words, their focus on words is tightly tied to their understanding of what Ken wants to achieve in this assignment.

### **2.3.3 A Re-Wording Activity?**

Even in more analytical assignments, a focus on a word or several words can point to substantive issues. A workshop of Pamela’s second paper in Schmidt’s class reveals that sometimes the words students use, especially strong words, can signal how they have understood the material about which they are writing. Like many of DePauw’s new students, Pamela is from an Indianapolis suburb. In her first interview, Pamela told me that she chose to attend DePauw because it reminded her of her high school. She attended one of the most elite private high schools in the state of Indiana, known for its small class-sizes, its commitment to equipping students to be intellectually competent adults, and its reputation for seeing its graduates admitted to top colleges and universities. In addition to College Writing II, Pamela’s first semester courses included Introduction to Psychology, a first-year seminar that focused on Japanese Youth

Cultures, and beginning ballet. She expected to major in Psychology and eventually hopes to earn her “PhD and work with people who have eating disorders.”

Initially, Pamela expressed pleasant surprise over the format of College Writing II: “I really like how it’s kind of like my class in high school – very discussion based. I thought it was going to be ‘this is how you write a paper.’” During her senior year, Pamela, and several other students in my study, enrolled in ACP W 130/131 as her composition class.<sup>11</sup>

For her final paper in ACP W 131, Pamela wrote what she described as an extended research paper on how different cultures perceive beauty. The assignment required her to engage with primary and secondary source material; she was more proud of this piece of writing than of anything else she had written. Although Pamela said that she would “rather write a paper than take a test,” she also identified a number of qualities about her writing she wished were better. Drawing on the discussion from Schmidt’s class on the day I interviewed her, Pamela said, “I struggle most with the intent thing – getting my ideas across clearly.” In addition, she claimed, “My sentence structure isn’t very good – it’s really wordy and not clear.”

Pamela participated actively in Schmidt’s class, particularly at the beginning of the semester. Schmidt rarely directed questions toward specific students, but she often asked follow-up questions to encourage individual students to clarify something they had said. In the

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<sup>11</sup> ACP – Advanced College Project – is

a partnership program between Indiana University and participating high schools within the states of Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. ACP offers college credit to qualified high school seniors who enroll in IU general education courses that are offered at their local high schools during the regular school day and taught by certified high school teachers who hold adjunct lecturer status with Indiana University. (“What is ACP?”)

Students who take ACP courses in high school and then matriculate at Indiana University – and other universities in the state of Indiana – receive college credit for those courses. However, because ACP courses are taken on the high school campus rather than on the college campus, students who want DePauw credit for their ACP work receive credit for College Writing I: they must still enroll in College Writing II.

following exchange, which took place during the first discussion of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Pamela thoughtfully answered a question and then its follow-up:

*Pamela:* It was helpful to have read 'What Did You Expect?' before starting this novel.

*Schmidt:* If you hadn't read Allison's essay, what kind of challenges would you face?

*Pamela:* Knowing her background helps me know what she means by stereotypes.

After a few minutes of discussion about whether the events depicted in *Bastard Out of Carolina* are fictional or autobiographical, Schmidt said, "We're not gonna know, folks! We can't know with things that are autobiographical in nature how autobiographical they are." She then posed the question, "What are the advantages Allison has by writing this as a work of fiction?" Pamela answered first: "It's easier to market something as fiction." Because Pamela typically answered questions in this direct, concise manner, she seemed uncomfortable explaining her ideas. When Schmidt asked her on this occasion to expand upon her answer, she ultimately said, "I don't know."

Although eager to participate early in the semester, Pamela's enthusiasm for the class waned a bit in the latter weeks. She seemed increasingly resistant to the course after she volunteered her paper to be work-shopped by Schmidt. Prior to the class session on October 23, Pamela emailed her paper to Schmidt. During the class session, Schmidt planned to read through Pamela's paper in order to attempt to give students a sense of how she reads students' papers and to model for them the kind of reading she hoped they would attempt as they read the drafts they exchanged with one another. Pamela's essay responded to the following prompt:

Choose two essays from David Sedaris' *Naked*. Draw a substantive connection between them. Discuss and develop the connection in your paper. You may also refer to other essays or moments in the book.

Pamela's essay focused on the control Sedaris asserts over situations in the essays "A Plague of Tics" and "The Incomplete Quad." Although Pamela later told me she thought her draft was very strong, Schmidt raised a number of questions about her claims. More than halfway through the class period, and after Pamela already seemed fairly defensive, Schmidt turned to the following sentence: "Sedaris's mother thinks he is some kind of pervert who is only using Peg for favors and to make him look like a decent human being." (Peg is a paraplegic who Sedaris befriends at college; Pamela claims that Sedaris "controls" Peg and uses her to his own gain.)

Schmidt questioned Pamela's choice of the word "pervert." She said that the word "doesn't seem very telling, does it?" Already seeming overwhelmed by the criticism her paper had received, Pamela's emotions appeared ready to boil over. She spoke up: "Actually I looked that word up and a pervert is someone who takes advantage of someone else sexually. That's exactly what I wanted to suggest about Sedaris." Everyone in the classroom sat quietly for a moment before Schmidt reminded her that "there is no sexual taking advantage..." To this, Pamela quickly responded, "But that's what I thought his *mom* thought."

It's hard to know from where Pamela drew this interpretation. In "The Incomplete Quad," Sedaris unquestionably benefits – in a material way – from his relationship with Peg. Even his decision to room with her is advantageous to him because "the state would pay" any student's board if he or she "roomed with a handicapped student" (145). When it comes to stealing, Sedaris uses Peg's disability to his advantage, but the point is not exclusively to obtain things, or to get from point A to point B. Rather, Sedaris claims their purpose is "to take from an unfair

world” (146). Posing as a young married couple on the way home to Raleigh from Ohio, the two received gifts in the form of money, free food, lodging, and rides from many who passed by. Upon arriving home and witnessing the two easily con Sedaris’ father out of his watch and belt, Sedaris’ mother admonishes him, “I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, mister, but you ought to be ashamed of yourself” (149). Nothing in this essay suggests to me that Sedaris is a pervert or that his mother thinks he is, but if Pamela wanted to argue that Sedaris’s mother thinks this, she needed to do more to convey from where this interpretation arose. In all likelihood, this will mean that she must return to Sedaris’s essay and consider it more carefully. Pamela’s word choice suggests, in other words, an underlying difficulty with her interpretation of the primary text.

As Ken’s and Pamela’s papers suggest, words and word-level issues can sometimes be rooted in more substantive issues. In Ken’s case, classmates pointed to words that they thought diminished his otherwise fairly consistent portrait of the inner-workings of a teenage girl’s mind. In Pamela’s case, her teacher suggested that her word choice signaled an incomplete understanding – or at the very least incomplete development of her understanding of – the text she attempted to interpret. Thus, while, like Sommers, I have observed that some first-year students focus on word-level changes when they are asked to help classmates revise their writing, I think it is important to note that not all comments related to words are simply “a rewording activity” the aim of which is to “clean up speech” (381). On the contrary, the comments Max, Kendra, Denise, Paula, Kimberly and Schmidt make all point to “something larger” that Ken and Pamela need to consider as they revise their drafts.

Like all binaries, the “word level” vs. “idea level” or “higher-order concern” vs. “lower-order concern” binary has serious limitations. So too would it be limited to suggest that

classroom peers offer feedback related to “x” while peer tutors offer feedback related to “y.” One pattern that does emerge from the comments – written by Schmidt’s students and offered verbally by Davis’s students – is that classroom peers tend to phrase their suggestions as statements which sometimes resemble commands. Although Michael does add question marks after the words “elaborate” and “expand,” other comments he makes are more clearly directive: “focus on topic sentences;” “expand vocab.” In the workshop of Ken’s paper, students tended to tell him what they would like to see changed without asking what Ken hoped to achieve with some of his word choices, for example.

Another pattern I noticed is that classroom peers tend to have a product-centered sense of revision. By this I mean that as they read a peer’s paper, they seem to think of it alone as what the student has to work with. There’s little evidence that the peers draw students’ attention back to the assigned material with which they’re engaged (in Schmidt’s class) or that they help students imagine other possibilities for what they might be able to create (in Davis’s class).

Kenneth Bruffee, who has contributed significantly to theories about collaborative learning, suggests that writing is inherently collaborative. When we write, he says,

we are continually making judgments, large and small, each one affecting all the others: what to write about, what to say about it, how to say it, how to begin, what word to use, how to phrase this sentence, where to put the comma. Writing is one dad-drafted decision after another. And learning to make knowledgeable, discerning, reliable decisions in any activity is [...] something we learn best collaboratively. (56)

Though Schmidt and Davis use different collaborative techniques, they each incorporate collaborative techniques into their classrooms for the very reasons Bruffee offers. He articulates,



in a somewhat light-hearted way, the demanding nature of decision making related to writing and argues that one of the most effective ways for students to begin to make good decisions about their writing is to be engaged in peer response groups where ideas and writing are shared.

Bruffee's words also indicate that the goals of collaboration ought to be long-term intellectual goals; that is, collaboration in the writing classroom should primarily serve "to help students internalize conversation about writing and carry it away with them so that they continue to be good writers on their own" (58). The goal of collaboration, then, is that the conversations that students learn to have with peers when they collaborate – and effective conversations about writing must be practiced and learned – ultimately become an orientation toward writing that students can take with them out of composition classrooms to writing situations for other courses, jobs, or personal use.

Learning this orientation is crucial because individuals may find that when they have to write for such situations they do not have a built-in peer group to read and respond to their writing. Learning "to talk about how they make writing judgments and arrive at writing decisions" (58) in a peer group context is learning an orientation to writing that can be reproduced when students begin to revise their own writing without the aid of collaborators; the orientation toward writing that allows them to "identify something larger" that needs the writer's attention is learned through collaboration.

Unfortunately, it does not seem that most students recognize this long-term goal of collaboration. When they comment on one another's work, they more often focus on short-term improvement, "to improve students' writing here and now" (Bruffee 58). In the next three chapters, I turn to writing center tutorials. Most students visit the writing center because they have papers that they want to improve "here and now," a request that I noted in Chapter 1 that

can stand in contrast to the goal the writing center imagines it has, a goal to “improve writers” which is more in line with Bruffee’s long-term sense of collaboration. As I will show in the chapters that follow, writing center tutorials sometimes foster revision in both senses – of revision as the changing of this specific piece of writing and of revision as an orientation toward writing that students develop as they engage in sophisticated and challenging discussion about their writing with engaged peer tutors.

### **3.0 TUTORING THAT HELPS STUDENTS “INVENT THE UNIVERSITY”**

The writing center at DePauw University is part of the Academic Resource Center (ARC). In addition to the writing center, the ARC houses centers for quantitative reasoning and speaking and listening. Each of these three centers – Q, S, and W – is directed by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member and staffed by undergraduate peer tutors. The writing center and ARC are well located on the second floor of Harrison Hall, one of the university’s main academic buildings. Its open floor plan, large windows, comfortable couches, tables, and chairs invite students into this airy, well-used space.<sup>12</sup>

The Q, S and W centers exist in large part to support the university’s three competence requirements. In order to graduate, DePauw students must earn 31 credits (1 course=1 credit). Of these, approximately 1/3 (11 credits) fulfill DePauw’s general education requirements in six groups:

- natural science and mathematics
- social and behavioral sciences
- literature and the arts
- historical and philosophical understanding

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<sup>12</sup> Writing centers at other Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) schools are similarly well located. At Denison, the main writing center occupies the entire fourth floor of Barney Davis Hall (an academic building) with satellite locations in the library and Fellows Hall, another academic building. At Kenyon College, the writing center is located on the library’s third floor, and it is in Mudd Hall, an academic building, at Oberlin University.

- foreign language
- self-expression through performance and participation

Another 1/3 – approximately 8 to 10 courses – will eventually satisfy a student’s major requirements. The final 1/3 of a student’s credits will be earned through electives, minors, double-majors, and/or honors programs.

Finally, all students at DePauw must earn credit in courses designated Q, S, and W. This requirement, known as the “competence requirement” represents the university’s commitment to fundamental tenets of liberal arts education. Courses that satisfy the quantitative reasoning (Q) requirement are offered regularly in the departments of Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology. Oral communication courses (S) are most commonly offered in Communication Arts and Sciences, and in Senior Seminar and other upper-level courses across the curriculum. W courses, which must be attempted by the end of the sophomore year, are offered widely throughout the curriculum. In these content-courses, teachers incorporate writing instruction, writing assignments, and revision.

Although the three competence centers developed in response to these competence requirements, all the centers provide support to students enrolled in courses other than those designated Q, S, or W. This is particularly true of the writing center which typically serves more students from College Writing and First-Year Seminar courses than from W courses. During the 2006-2007 school year, for example, 1063 students visited the writing center.<sup>13</sup> In 213 of those visits, 20% of them, tutors worked with students enrolled in a W course. Twenty-two percent of visits were from students enrolled in College Writing and 11% were from students enrolled in

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<sup>13</sup> The number of students who use DePauw’s writing center fluctuates rather significantly. In nine of the last ten school years, many more students have used the writing center during the fall semester than during the spring semester.

First-Year Seminar. The largest percentage of students who visit the writing center – 44% in 2006-2007 – are enrolled in courses that are not designated W, FYS, or College Writing. This data reveals two important aspects about writing at DePauw.<sup>14</sup> First, students write in many courses throughout the curriculum and not just in courses designated “writing intensive.” Second, the writing center, though originally conceived as one that would support the writing competence requirement, serves any DePauw student who asks for feedback about his or her writing.

Because DePauw University offers only bachelor’s degrees and enrolls only undergraduate students, the writing center is staffed exclusively by undergraduate peer tutors.<sup>15</sup> At some universities, students “come to writing center because they are required to” (Harris, “Talking” 28), but at DePauw nearly every visit is a voluntary one. That is to say that a few instructors require all their students to visit the writing center for help with a given assignment, but this accounts for only a small percentage of each year’s visits. Students who visit the writing center may come only once or may repeat visits as often as they are able. However, there are no “standing” weekly appointments as there are at some writing centers. Rather, students make appointments or drop in to work with a tutor on an as-needed basis.

Students come to the writing center for a variety of reasons ranging from proof-reading help to advice about constructing a thesis statement to brainstorming a topic. From the tutor’s

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<sup>14</sup> These percentages closely match visit data collected over a three year period.

<sup>15</sup> In this dissertation, “peer tutor” refers exclusively to undergraduate students tutoring other undergraduates. However, the term “peer tutor” appears to mean different things depending upon the institutional context. In an essay titled “Peer Tutoring: Keeping the Contradiction Productive,” Jane Cogie describes an interaction between a student and her peer tutor, Ken. Cogie describes Ken as “a white Ph.D. student in literature” and the student (Janelle) as a “white, traditional-aged, first-year student and one of his regular weekly appointments” (41). It is unclear to me how Ken could be considered a “peer tutor” to Janelle. I understood “peer tutor” to refer to undergraduate peer tutors or, possibly, to graduate students tutoring other graduate students. Based on Cogie’s usage, it seems that “peer tutor” may also be used to refer to a tutor – regardless of the tutor’s status in the university (undergraduate, graduate, adjunct?) – who is not responsible for grading the student.

perspective, the goal of collaboration is to meet students where they are and help them move their writing and ideas to the next level, whatever level that may be. Most often, this means that tutors model to students how audience members perceive their writing, and help them see the gaps in their thinking, logic, and language. Tutors ultimately want to help students figure out what they think and how to present that thinking effectively in their writing.

Still, the peer tutors are undergraduate students, not experts, and are not meant to take the place of instructors. Rather, they support and contribute to DePauw's culture of writing. In "Intimacy and Audience: The Relationship between Revision and the Social Dimension of Peer Tutoring," Thom Hawkins argues that precisely because peer tutors are "still living the undergraduate experience," students and tutors are "more likely to see each other as equals and to create an open, communicative atmosphere, even though the peer tutor is a more advanced student who has already gained a foothold in the system. [...] The tutor is further along than the tutee, but both know that the tutor is not so far along as to have forgotten what learning how to cope with the system is like" (66-67). Hawkins draws his conclusions from the tutoring journals written by peer tutors at his writing center at Berkeley. He suggests that the conversations between students and tutors, the one-on-one attention, and the relatively small space that separates them from one another academically are all valuable components of the relationship.

Peer tutors at DePauw, as at most places, are trained extensively. Since 1996, this training has been overseen by Professor of English and Writing Center Director Susan Hahn. Hahn chooses new tutors each spring and trains them each fall. The application process begins when professors from across the disciplines recommend students they think would make good tutors based on a variety of factors including strong writing, warm inter-personal skills, solid grade point averages, and, often, evidence of growth as a writer. Students who are nominated by

faculty members are invited to submit applications, writing samples, and additional recommendations. Each year approximately 20-25 students apply for 10-12 open positions.

During the fall semester, new tutors enroll in a ½ credit course – the tutor training practicum – which serves as their introduction to tutoring theories and practices. Students read Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* and excerpts from Muriel Harris’s *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*, and from Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith’s *The Practical Tutor*. They also begin tutoring immediately. As part of their training, they write a weekly journal in which they attempt to connect what they are reading and learning about during the tutor practicum with their actual tutoring sessions. Class-time is devoted to discussing readings and situations tutors faced during tutorials.

At DePauw, as at many institutions, peer response of one kind or another is a fairly widespread practice among teachers of first-year composition. So, too, are conferences between students and teachers. Why, then, do so many institutions have writing centers, particularly writing centers that students attend on a strictly volunteer basis? What benefit did the more than 1000 students who used DePauw’s writing center during the 2006-2007 academic year gain from using its services?

Claims made about the work that writing centers and the tutors who staff them typically glorify both centers and tutors. In her essay, “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” Muriel Harris describes the role tutors play this way:

The tutor [...] inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher. Because the tutor sits below the teacher on the academic ladder, the tutor can work effectively with students in ways that teachers can not. Tutors don’t need to take attendance, make assignments, set deadlines, deliver negative comments, give

tests, or issue grades. Students readily view a tutor as someone to help them surmount the hurdles others have set up for them, and as a result respond differently to tutors than to teachers, a phenomenon readily noticed by tutors who end a stint of writing center tutoring and then go off to teach their own classes. (28)

Harris describes the attributes that distinguish tutors from teachers to suggest that the less authoritative role tutors play facilitates learning (“surmounting hurdles”) in a positive way that an interaction with a teacher cannot. Elsewhere she positions tutors on that same ladder somewhere above the students they tutor and claims that “Peer response groups may help [students sort through and formulate conceptual frameworks for drafts of their papers], but a tutor who is trained to ask probing questions and who focuses her attention on the writer offers a more effective environment for the writer” (31). This claim drives to the core of the belief many writing center directors hold about their centers and the work done in them: that tutors are more effective collaborators than classroom peers.

Yet little scholarship substantiates this claim or the many others that idealize the work that goes on in writing centers. In her essay “Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups,” Harris draws on others’ research about the effectiveness of peer response groups. Her title suggests that the collaboration types – tutorials vs. peer response groups – vary and, given her long-standing support for writing centers, seems to imply that the collaboration is “better” in the writing center. Harris concludes that “there is indeed a solid argument to be made for helping our students experience and reap the benefits of both forms of collaboration” (285). The problem with this argument – as with many arguments made about writing centers – is that little evidence supports the claims made.



Even her observational data draws on a conglomerate observation rather than one tied to specific tutorials. For example, Harris remarks that “Tutors are likely to get both honest answers and honest questions from students (usually preceded by ‘I know this is a dumb question, but...’) because the tutor has the unique advantage of being both a nonjudgmental, non-evaluative helper [...] and a skilled colleague” (279). I do not necessarily disagree with this claim. But no matter how much writing center professionals agree with this generalization and the many others like it, generalization and idealization do not make it so.

Much writing center research – like research as a whole in Composition Studies – tends toward “qualitative or naturalistic studies of students’ composing processes” (Lerner 59). Michael Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead echo this critique saying that, “The ‘proof’ of writing center effectiveness, though a necessity in times of tight budgets and strident calls for accountability, has often relied on anecdotal evidence or research studies with shaky methodologies” (7). Calls for quantitative research with more sound methodologies have met with a few studies, most of which involve “ticking off the numbers of students who come through our doors and subdividing them according to categories that would make a census taker proud” and “are adequate to the level of accountability to which [writing center directors] are held” (Lerner 60).<sup>16</sup> Neal Lerner describes two quantitative studies that have been published about the work done in writing centers (one his own), but ultimately shows how attempts to numerically correlate variables – SATV score with first-year composition final grade and number of writing center visits, for example – to show cause and effect reveal how problematic such quantitative methods can be.

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<sup>16</sup> At both the 2007 and 2008 CCCC, panels featured speakers devoted to quantitative research in the writing center. These quantitative projects included an analysis of the frequency of silence in tutorials (Evans) and an assessment of metcognitive development in writing center tutors (Kunka).

Still, if writing centers and their directors want to be taken seriously as sites of intellectual engagement and as scholars, it will remain “incumbent upon us to produce research and scholarship that meets the highest standards of intellectual rigor. It must pass muster theoretically, methodologically, and professionally” (Pemberton and Kinkead 6). My methods are, for the most part, qualitative. However, I designed my study so that I can observe the behaviors of first-year students in two settings – their classrooms and the writing center – and my data set consists of classroom field notes and writing center transcripts (which provide insight into students’ writing instruction and processes) and of drafts of their papers throughout the semester. In total, this data set allows me to study and interpret the changes in both writers and their writing over time. I have attempted to apply the same kinds of analytical and intellectually rigorous close-reading behaviors that a literary critic would apply to literary and cultural texts to my consideration of the texts and transcripts that constitute this study’s data. My analysis is informed by the knowledge I gained in various roles over nearly a decade of work at DePauw: peer tutor, writing center intern, instructor, interim writing center director, and as a member of the writing program coordinating committee. I combined my “inside” knowledge from working in these different capacities with the understanding of composition theory that I gained as a graduate student and teaching assistant at the University of Pittsburgh.

One central research question pervaded my analysis: (how) do tutoring sessions in the writing center help students revise their writing? In order to probe this question, I chose to study student writing, both drafts and revisions. While writing center researchers have turned to

tutorial transcripts with some regularity, there are fewer examples of research that turns to student writing.<sup>17</sup>

Analysis of the more than 35 hours of taped sessions and seven binders filled with student writing reveals that students who visit the writing center call upon tutors to play many roles. While “revision” is always on the table in some way, the data from my study suggests that the tutoring that goes on in the writing center is far more complex and far less ideal than many of the anecdotal accounts make it seem. Though a question about revision guided the research, to ignore findings based on the data obtained would be short-sighted. Thus, this chapter focuses on the ways that tutors help foster intellectualism in the students with whom they work. In the next chapter I will explore how tutors help students revise their writing.

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The history of writing centers – that is, their “evolution” from remedial sites to more collaborative spaces where students and tutors work to produce “better writers, not better writing” (North 438) – has been well-rehearsed.<sup>18</sup> Although it is no longer the dominant model, some writing centers do still support students who need “remedial” help.<sup>19</sup> This is not the writing

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<sup>17</sup> Writing center publications that include tutorial transcripts include Peter Carino’s “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring”; Jane Cogie’s “Peer Tutoring: Keeping the Contradiction Positive”; Alice Gillam’s “Collaborative Learning Theory and Peer Tutoring Practice”; Julie Neff’s “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center”; and Thomas Newkirk’s “The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference.” In *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, Nancy Welch turns to both tutorial transcripts and to student writing to consider the revisions students make to their writing. In “The Return of the Suppressed: Tutoring Stories in a Transitional Space,” Welch engages with tutors’ journals. Anne DiPardo also uses student writing in *A Kind of Passport* and “Whispers of Coming and Going’: Lessons from Fannie.”

<sup>18</sup> See especially Peter Carino, “Early Writing Centers: Toward a History” and Elizabeth H. Boquet, “‘Our Little Secret’: A History of Writing Centers Pre- to Post-Open Admissions”

<sup>19</sup> For example, the University of Pittsburgh’s writing center houses the Composition Tutorial (CT) program that less skilled writers in Seminar in Composition, the required first-year writing course, are required to enroll in. The CT course description states that during writing center tutorials, “we aren’t going to be working explicitly on the content of your essays. The issues we will be focusing on are what we will call sentence- and paragraph-level issues,

center model at DePauw where its promotional materials suggest that the writing center serves all writers and offers help primarily with thesis, organization, development and voice: in DePauw's writing center, tutors and students deal primarily with higher order concerns.

Of course, sometimes the content that students have drafted prior to coming to the writing center does not adequately complete the assigned writing task. In an essay in *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, Ben Raforth cautions that "The papers students bring to the writing center are snapshots, not movie reels, and they don't begin to represent the full range of a student's abilities" (76-77). Sometimes students – particularly first-year students – do not understand what is expected of them; other times, they sense what is expected but have not yet "learned to speak our language" (Bartholomae 61) or developed a strategy "for handling the whole essay" (Sommers, "Revision Strategies" 383). In his 1985 essay "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae imagines the problems that students face when they write for college instructors:

The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other. He must learn to speak our language. Or he must dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and

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because they have to do with the ways you put sentences and paragraphs together effectively in order to write an essay" ("Comp Tutorial").

writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is “learned.” And this, understandably, causes problems. (61)

Bartholomae observes that students “try on” the language they associate with the academy when they write in university classes. During an interview held within the first few weeks of the semester, Isabella (one of the case study participants) expressed this very idea. “I want to sound scholarly in my writing,” Isabella said. “I don’t speak like it, but in my head, I want to sound professional. I don’t want to write, ‘I did this today...’.” Even Isabella’s example suggests that she senses she must turn away from the language of “personal history” (what she did today) in favor of language she can only describe as “scholarly.”

While part of what Bartholomae describes in the long passage above is language and the way students use and appropriate it upon entering the university, when he refers to “assembling language” and learning the “requirements of convention,” he also suggests that students must learn what academics use language to do (argue, summarize, explore, narrate, describe, etc.) and what they count as “evidence.” Carrying off the bluff, then, is not just about *sounding* scholarly, but also about *inquiring* as a scholar might. Bartholomae declares that students have to “learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the [...] *various* discourses of our community” (60) and by this he means that regardless of preparation, upon entering the university, students are called upon to think and to present that thinking according to the conventions of various departments, disciplines, and fields. In other words, students must not only learn to “speak our language,” but they must also learn the habits of mind – including intellectual curiosity and engagement – that academics exhibit.

The data I collected suggests that peer tutors can help foster intellectual curiosity in the students with whom they work. In a few sessions, I observed peer tutors help students learn to act like scholars act when they are ready to do more than mimic them. Tutors (who are by their very nature “good students”) and tutorials may serve as catalysts as students develop to the point at which they are able to “actually and legitimately do the work of the discourse” (Bartholomae 83). In the writing center, by reading carefully, asking thoughtful questions, and showing they are genuinely curious about students’ writing – all things that students may be unaccustomed to – tutors can simultaneously model for and engage students in the type of critical inquiry that characterizes academic work.

Raforth and others have claimed that writing centers are – or ought to be thought of as – places where intellectual work takes place. As I argued in relation to Michael’s reading of Rachel’s paper in Chapter 2, classroom peers may provide one another with suggestions for improving their writing, but often stop short of engaging with another student’s ideas. “A supportive tutor,” Raforth writes, is “a constructive critic [...]. Ideas, arguments, and values are what writing is about, and students who come to a writing center need a real audience. If a writer’s paper seems to lack any kind of analysis or deeper thought, who better to hear it from than a peer?” (82). A few of the tutoring sessions I taped during the semester suggest that peer tutors often help – or try to help – students take a more analytical and intellectual approach to their writing.

### **3.1 IT'S HARD TO PUT INTO WORDS: TUTORING THAT HELPS STUDENTS FIND THEIR WORDS**

One of the tutoring sessions that best illustrates how tutors attempt to engage students in intellectual conversations about their topics took place between James, a senior tutor who began tutoring during his sophomore year, and Michelle as she wrote her first paper for Schmidt's class. A quiet student, Michelle came to DePauw from out-of-state. She grew up in a mid-sized Midwestern city and learned of DePauw from an older friend enrolled there. By the time I met Michelle on the first day of school, she was already involved in extra-curricular life as a varsity cheerleader, a sport she participated in during all four years of high school. Michelle described herself as science-minded; she planned to major in biology and said that as a result of her aptitude for science, "I'm not the greatest writer." Her first semester classes reflected these interests; in addition to College Writing II, she enrolled in the first-year seminar entitled Modern Environmental Problems, Introduction to Biology, and Review of Elementary Spanish.

According to Michelle, her high school's English department "wasn't the greatest." Although she took English during all four years of high school, she said that her senior year course prepared her most for College Writing II. That course – Composition 110 – also earned students credit at the local community college. During the semester long course, Michelle said that she wrote six papers: "One was about a personal experience; for one I had to interview an interesting person; for another I had to evaluate a place – I chose Chuck E. Cheese." She smiled as she described that paper and added that she never had to write a paper "off a poem or literature or anything."

When I asked Michelle to describe her strengths and weaknesses as a writer, she didn't hesitate. "I usually never pick very uncreative topics," she said. "I like to kind of go out of the

box. I just don't like to write about anything boring." Though it was early in the semester, Michelle's choice of topic for her first paper supported this assertion. Students were given two paper topic choices and Michelle was one of only a handful of students to write on Anne Sexton's poem "Self in 1958." (Most other students in the class responded to the prompt about Dorothy Allison's essay "What Did You Expect?" quoted in Chapter 2.) While Michelle perceived her creativity and risk-taking as strengths, she said "I struggle a lot with grammar and punctuation." In her high school composition course, "every error you had took your grade down a whole letter grade or something." With such a harsh penalty for surface errors, it was easy to empathize with Michelle when she said, "It's not that I don't like writing, but I never get as good a grade as I want."

It is probably this desire – to get a good grade – that initially motivated Michelle to participate in my study. As is the case with many first-year students, Michelle did not know exactly what she needed to do to earn the "good grades" she desired. During her first writing center session, James helped her begin to see what might be expected of her and to negotiate ways she might achieve it.

Michelle's first paper, "The Performer," is essentially a close reading of Anne Sexton's poem "Self In 1958." The assignment prompted students:

Anne Sexton's poem, "Self In 1958" (Convergences 85) begins with a perplexing question: "What is reality?". How does Sexton answer or address the question in her poem?

Schmidt also gave students significant parameters for the format of their papers. She directed, "Your paper should have an introduction in which you anchor the thesis or central proposition (more on this in class); body paragraphs, with topic sentences, that support and develop (rather



than simply repeat) your thesis [...]; and a conclusion that ends on a thoughtful, perhaps surprising note.” In other words, students were asked to compose a fairly classic, focused argumentative essay.

In her paper, Michelle attempts several things. First, she asserts that Sexton (the speaker?)<sup>20</sup> is “like an actor in a play. Onstage there is the magnificent character the actor pretends to be and the audience accepts, but behind the curtain there is a completely different person.” Second, she analyzes the imagery of dolls and dollhouses that Sexton uses to describe the life the speaker lives. In the conclusion, Michelle extends her earlier claim that Sexton/the speaker has two counterparts by saying that the speaker does not know anymore “which one is really her.”

Prior to coming to the writing center, Michelle had already revised the paper based on comments from the classroom peer response. In the margins of Michelle’s paper, her classmate offered comments about her thesis statement. He wrote, “You may want to sharpen up the thesis and add a bit more clarity.” The peer did not offer any specific advice; however, Michelle revised her thesis and in the draft she brings to the writing center it asserts that “Throughout the poem [Sexton] describes her feelings of anguish towards both the image she is expected to convey, *and her frustrations with herself for conveying it.*” The portion Michelle added after the peer response (italicized) offers a useful complication to her argument.

The classroom peer reader also made numerous marks related to what each paragraph is about, an effort, it seems, to help with organization (or more specifically, making the sections of the paper cohere in some way). The classroom peer suggested there was an organizational

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<sup>20</sup> Because I was not in class during the session that students discussed this poem, I do not know what they said about it, nor do I know whether or not Schmidt addressed the difference between a poem’s author and a poem’s speaker, for example. Michelle’s paper suggests that Sexton herself is the speaker; a simple comment Schmidt wrote on the graded draft – “Sexton vs. the narrator” – makes me wonder if the difference was noted in class.

problem but a more expert reader might identify the problem as one that is not only organizational but one related also to logic and development. Michelle's paper offers a stanza by stanza reading of the poem but she does not always tie her usually sharp analysis back to the idea that the speaker's "true personality" is not accurately conveyed by the way she acts (or is compelled to act). Neither does she suggest what that "true personality" is (and how we know it).

Another weakness, perhaps, is that Michelle's draft does not explicitly engage with the question asked in the prompt; that is, Michelle does not explore how Sexton deals with the question "What is reality?" in her paper.<sup>21</sup> Michelle claims that this is "an extremely powerful and thought-provoking question" but that she "honestly [doesn't] think that Sexton knows herself" the answer to the question. Rather, Michelle writes, "[Sexton] just presents the different aspects of her life to the readers, allowing them to draw their own conclusions." One way to interpret Michelle's first sentence is to suggest that she wanted to answer the question asked in the assignment, but that it poses too great a challenge for her to take on at this point. In the next sentence, Michelle establishes what she is ready to do, namely identify the different "aspects of" Sexton's life. This kind of sentence – one that says it's up to readers to decide what the poem means – represents a fairly common move in papers written by first-year students. An ungenerous reader of this move would conclude that the student does not know how to craft a credible reading of the poem but will nonetheless attempt to fill four pages with what the poem meant to her alone. A kinder reader might see this statement as a "throat-clearing" move; it signals that when the student began writing, she was not sure what kind of conclusion she herself

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<sup>21</sup> There are many occasions when it is difficult to know "what the professor wants." And while it's frustrating for professors to hear that, Michelle's paper raises a question about what the professor wants: a unique thesis statement (like the one Michelle has written) or more pronounced engagement with the question of how Sexton addresses the question "what is reality?" Clearly Michelle has more options than doing one thing or the other, but when confronted with this draft, peers and tutors might be torn between urging the student to conform more to the assignment's question and urging the student to unpack the assertion made in the thesis.

would draw about the poem, but that by writing about it, she might learn or be able to articulate how Sexton addresses the question, “What is Reality?”

The first thing James said was that Michelle uses quotes well, and she does. In the third paragraph of her paper, Michelle introduces the doll imagery and writes,

In this particular poem, Sexton relates her life to that of a dolls. She declares, “I am a plaster doll: I pose” (2). This one line can give great insight into Sexton’s mind. By stating that she felt like a doll, she was stating that she felt as though she was trapped, trapped in the plastic shell with a smile painted on its face. On the inside of that shell, however, was a completely different story.

As this passage illustrates, Michelle came to college equipped with some of the discipline’s conventions. She knows to integrate quoted material into her own sentence structure and to interpret those quotations. Michelle also knew how to clearly transition between ideas; the “however” inserted into the final sentence quoted carries Michelle’s readers with her to the next point she makes.

While Michelle adeptly uses quoted material to support her assertions, there are signs of intellectual immaturity in her writing. James reread Michelle’s prompt because he was unclear about whether or not Michelle was supposed to answer the question “What is Reality?” After rereading the prompt, James realized that Michelle did not need to answer the question herself but that she did need to “talk about how Sexton addresses the question.” James read from and paraphrase Michelle’s opening paragraph:

*James:* Okay. So you sort of talk about how Sexton addresses the question, and you say, you know, you “honestly don’t think that Sexton knows herself.” You said that she’s confused about what reality means, and I wonder – you’ve talked a lot. You say there are “two parts of her are completely opposite, they are both very real,” but then you talk very much about how there’s the true self and her other self.

- Michelle:* Right.
- James:* So are those equally real, or are those –
- Michelle:* Okay. Yeah, that’s what I was trying to get at, but –
- James:* So you’re saying that they are – like is one the more, you know, true part of herself or the more –
- Michelle:* Yeah, I guess I was like trying to say that the part of her that – well, okay, she acts a certain way –
- James:* Okay.
- Michelle:* – which is reality, because that is how she’s acting, but there’s her personality that conflicts with that.
- James:* Okay. So you’re sort of talking about – maybe one thing you could consider doing is defining “reality” and “behaviors,” because that’s a lot – you know, you can say it’s the “real her.” It’s sort of the personality that she keeps hidden inside. At the same time, if you’re talking about what is reality, you know, what can it be other than what she actually does? So I think maybe that’s an interesting idea you could focus on is this sort of double nature of reality between what’s more honest and sort of true versus what’s more actually happening.

As the dialogue excerpted above reveals, James quickly identified a problem with Michelle’s paper: she had not clarified how she defined a key term – “reality” – which, in turn, made it difficult to follow the moves her paper made. James showed her how what was on the surface a writing problem – Michelle’s terms were not well defined – points to an issue that is less about the words on the page than it is about the thinking behind Michelle’s argument.

Two other times during the session, James asked Michelle questions that he hoped would help her clarify what she meant by phrases like “true self” and “real personality” : “Who do you think is the more true self? Is that the same as the ‘real’ her?” Michelle was reluctant to answer, or perhaps did not understand that James was actually asking her to think about this question by talking through it. Sensing that Michelle had still not quite addressed the question asked in the

prompt, James tried again a few minutes later: “So if you had to tell me, how would you say, like, how does she address the question ‘What is reality?’ You’ve got all the right ideas here, I think, so...”

Michelle answered, “I honestly think that – I don’t know. Like it’s so hard to put into words, I guess. It’s like my problem, which you can tell on the paper.” Michelle seemed uncomfortable with the difficult, probing questions that James had asked her. By saying “I don’t know,” Michelle was not saying, as Bartholomae notes, that she had nothing to say. Rather, she was saying that she was “not in a position to carry on this discussion” (63). Michelle’s apparent reluctance to brainstorm and talk through her thoughts, which was essentially what James had asked her to do, did not reflect resistance or passivity; she was not at all combative, or rude. Neither was she unengaged. However, she did not seem to know how to participate in the conference. Maybe she didn’t expect to do this kind of thinking in writing center; maybe she was not yet equipped to carry on the discussion.

When James asked her at the beginning of the session what she particularly wanted to work on, Michelle said, “But I’m like very – pretty much a weak writer like with like commas and punctuation and pretty much stuff like that.” This suggests that she and James had different expectations about the tutorial’s focus. Though James’s attempts to engage Michelle in an intellectual discussion seemed only marginally successful, the paper’s revision suggests that Michelle considered the questions James asked her. In the revision, she attempted to more explicitly address the question asked in the assignment prompt.

The most significant changes Michelle made are the reordering of some paragraphs, the addition of transitional words and phrases, and the addition of a few phrases that clarify her thoughts. Michelle’s thesis remains that “Throughout the poem she describes her feelings of

anguish towards both the image she is expected to convey, and her frustrations with herself for conveying it.” Although the idea of “reality” is not explicit here, it surfaces prominently in the second paragraph. Here Michelle grapples with the idea of the two conflicting images and how both are real. She writes,

Although Sexton was much different from other women of her time, she mimicked their actions, conforming to the societal views of how women should present themselves. Her real personality, however, totally conflicted with her image. These two parts of Sexton were complete opposites, but they were both realities. Sexton might not have liked the way she represented herself, but she did represent herself in that way, and it was reality.

As Michelle said during the writing center conference, her ideas about this poem are “hard to put into words.” But in this paragraph she does a fair job. The poem’s language does express anguish over the way the speaker is made to look – “shellacked and grinning” (4) – or to act in the “all-electric kitchen” (22). The speaker has little agency as someone else “plays” (21), “plants” (22), and “pretends” (24) with her. The problem is that Michelle neither defines how women of the time acted nor how Sexton’s “real personality” differed from theirs. I think she actually makes a good effort to do so in later paragraphs. For example, in the penultimate paragraph, Michelle writes about how the speaker of the poem sees other women acting and uses quotes from the poem to suggest that the speaker thought she needed to “conform to the stereotypical image of other women of the time.” But Michelle never says that, although the speaker sees herself being played with like a doll, being controlled by these social stereotypes, the “real personality” of this speaker is one who does not want to be held back by those stereotypes.

Michelle's revised paper is more effective than the draft she took to the writing center in several important ways. Of course even in her revision, Michelle is still "bluffing" to some extent: how could she not be when this is the first time she has written about poetry? Nevertheless, her terms are better defined, she has, in some places, better explained why she thinks what she thinks, and she has begun to grapple with some of the hard questions Sexton's poem presents to readers. The tutorial itself reveals a tutor engaged in the kinds of activities that "good writers" typically employ when they begin to write. That is, James began by reading the assignment prompt and identifying, precisely, what it required. He then turned to Michelle's draft – much as he might his own – and asked a hard, thoughtful question about the tentative argument presented there. Finally, James's genuine curiosity about what Michelle thought revealed to her the presence of a reader who could talk back, who could ask questions of the claims she made. This session illustrates how tutors can simultaneously model for and engage students in the type of critical inquiry that characterizes academic work. Although this won't be the case after every tutorial, in this case Michelle's revision reveals that she may be mimicking James's orientation to her writing when she returns to her dorm room and begins to make over her paper.

### **3.2 WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?:**

#### **TUTORING AS UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT**

Understanding what assignments ask of them is, in itself, an interpretative task for students: they have to figure out what is being asked of them by decoding teachers' language. When she distributed the first assignment to her students, Schmidt addressed this very fact. After reading

the prompt Michelle worked on aloud - “Anne Sexton’s poem, ‘Self in 1958’ (Convergences 85) begins with a perplexing question: ‘What is reality?’. How does Sexton answer or address the question in her poem?” – Schmidt asked students, “Where am I giving an interpretation in the topic itself?” After some prodding, a student finally pointed out that the word “perplexing” is an interpretative adjective. Schmidt’s purpose in pointing out the language of the assignment, I think, was to help students learn that they must study assignments carefully in order to figure out what they are being asked to do.

Davis’s assignments’ language also required students to interpret what was being asked of them. For example, in his “Editing Emily Dickinson” assignment, Davis instructed students to “act as editor and construct a final version of ‘The Spider Holds a Silver Ball.’” In addition to choosing words and deciding how to punctuate the poem, students had to compose “a rationale for [their] decisions.” The two weeks spent studying Dickinson, Davis’s verbal directions, and the final lines of the assignment – “Let two criteria guide you: your own aesthetic sense of which words and phrases best serve the internal meaning of the poem and your broader knowledge, gained from reading, of Dickinson’s tendencies in her other poems” – suggest that students’ decisions must be informed by patterns they noticed in Dickinson’s other poems. But the assignment is not overtly explicit on this point: students must interpret in Davis’s language that their *informed* explanations of their decisions are equally or more important than the explanations of the decisions they made.

Once students understand what is being asked of them, they must still figure out how to accomplish the assigned task. This often requires some students to think in ways they have not been asked to think before. In “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” Muriel Harris addresses how instructors’ directions to students are not always as transparent as



we intend. In language that echoes Bartholomae's, Harris writes, "Misunderstanding the assignment happens with such astonishing regularity that we ought more properly to view it as part of the educational process – learning the language of academic communities, learning how to understand that language, and learning how to act on that understanding" (Harris 39). Tutors sometimes act as translators, helping students to understand what an assignment is asking them to do.

Of all the students in the study, Kiki used the writing center the most frequently (17 times). Kiki grew up in rural Japan. She came to the United States in March 2003 and attended an English school in Denver for two and a half months. After completing this immersion program, Kiki moved to Indianapolis where she lived with several different host families who attended the same Christian church and school she attended for the final two years of high school. Although she had only been speaking English for about three years when I met her, she was easy to understand.

Kiki's spoken English was by no means flawless, and her written English was littered with grammatical errors, but Kiki worked extremely hard and by the end of the semester had established herself as one of the most thoughtful students in the Davis's class.

Kiki's new faith – she practiced Shintoism in Japan and said she was glad to be in the US where she "found the Lord" – pervaded many aspects of her life. She frequently signed emails to me "God Bless" and encouraged herself by praying. Her career goal was then to be a missionary doctor, but even early in the semester Kiki felt overwhelmed by the demands of college-level science: "I am interested in science...but I'm so bad at it! I don't know. I want to get into medical school if it's possible."

Kiki's religious beliefs also inform her writing. When I asked her to describe the paper she was most proud of writing (prior to college), she sighed and said,

Well...my third year paper. We had to make portfolio. I wrote about my best friend. He went to heaven but he was a very spiritual man. And, yeah, I wrote about him. And, uh, we had revise group ... in a group... they read my paper and marked what was wrong or what they liked the most and I had to write again in a couple process. Some of the students cried and I thought, you know maybe it wasn't very good grammars and good English, but something touched their heart and that meant me a lot.

Although Kiki did struggle to write (and speak) grammatically correct English, she felt that most of her peers were too easy on her when it came to grammar. When she visited the writing center, she found that some tutors would focus exclusively on content and ideas – as they were trained to do – and ignore grammar completely. She said, “They didn't want to offend me so they tried to keep what I have and then add things. They were afraid to cut things off.” In addition to reflecting some disappointment with peer tutors for being too kind, these quotes reflect Kiki's modesty. As her papers illustrate, Kiki's grammar rarely impeded understanding. More often than not, tutors do work with students to add new ideas and evidence. Kiki may have felt like others were easy on her, but Kiki was her own worst critic.

In mid-September, Kiki visited the writing center for help with the first portion of her portfolio project.<sup>22</sup> For her project, Kiki worked on the idea of “motherhood” and contrasted the ways Japanese and American women act within their families. When Kiki began the project, her

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<sup>22</sup> Recall that the “portfolio project” is one that students in Davis' class worked on throughout the semester. Each student chose a subject that interested him/her and composed various parts throughout the semester. As their final project for the semester, students wove the three assignments together into a complete whole.

ideas were much broader than the scope of the project could hold. Most students who grew up speaking and writing in English would be overwhelmed with the prospect of composing a 15 page paper; imagine Kiki's frame of mind when she began the portfolio project with this assignment:

In this initial part of your portfolio, evoke a sensory impression of your subject. As in the poetry you wrote and edited, create a scene with metaphorically significant details. If your subject is abstract, represent it physically. You need not incorporate argument, characterization, or narrative at this stage, but simply visualize your subject. In Shakespeare's words, "body forth the form of things unknown, turn them to shapes, and give to airy nothingness a local habitation and a name."

In some ways, this is a fairly straightforward assignment. Students are supposed to describe – "evoke a sensory impression" of – their chosen subject. The quote from Shakespeare at the assignment's end is meant to clarify Brown's instructions, but students must again interpret what it means to "body" something "forth." Moreover, given that this assignment will ultimately become a piece of something larger, it isn't difficult to see why, when Kiki explained the assignment to Hilary, the writing center tutor who worked with her on this assignment, Hilary asked, "I guess I'm confused about part one. Is this like an introduction to your paper, or is this like a 'mini-paper?'" Kiki revealed, "That's my question too! I don't get it!" After pointing to a sentence in the assignment prompt, Kiki continued, "what I understand was like this is the beginning of paper."

Although Kiki had already drafted some material – which she brought to the writing center on her laptop computer – Kiki and Hilary began by talking. Kiki explained to Hilary her idea for the portfolio project:

*Kiki:* [...] the topic I chose for this portfolio is women and mothers, like the strength of women and beauty of women, and later on I'm gonna kind of argue in the paper that, you know, in different countries like, for example, in Asia and in America, women are very different.

*Hilary:* Right.

*Kiki:* And, you know, some women keep it silent as her strength, and some women, you know, speak up and, you know, stand up for their rights as their strength, and those –

*Hilary:* But they both are showing strength, but just in different ways.

*Kiki:* Uh-hmm, yeah, and beautiful and, yeah, so I want to –

*Hilary:* Okay.

*Kiki:* Later on I'm gonna write paper about it, but right now it's just the –[...] – introduction.

*Hilary:* Oh, okay.

*Kiki:* What he wants me to do is describe the scene I have seen or why I chose that topic, and –

*Hilary:* Why you chose the topic of women and –

*Kiki:* Uh-hmm.

As I came to know Kiki more throughout the semester, it became very clear why she chose the topic she did. Kiki often referred to both her “mother” and her “American mother” (more frequently her “American family”). Kiki left her home in Japan as a teenager and, three years later, had not been back. Her family – or part of it – traveled to Indiana for her high school graduation, but that was the only time she saw them in more than two years. Like many college

women, Kiki grapples with who she wants to be as a woman: what will her career be? Will she find a person with whom to share her life? How will she negotiate the balance between the career that she hopes will come of her college education and the family she wants to have?

In addition to these questions – which only scratch the surface – Kiki has to grapple with the added dimension of cultural identity; perhaps Kiki wonders if it is possible to be a “traditional Japanese woman” (as she would probably describe her own mother) while living in America. These observations, of course, are derived not from my reading of this first portfolio installment, but from talking to Kiki and reading her writing throughout the semester. Early on, Kiki claimed her choice of topic grew out of a program she saw on television. She told Hilary:

*Kiki:* I was watching TV, and then there was a woman who was giving birth in Discovery Channel.

*Hilary:* Okay.

*Kiki:* And it touched my heart so much, and that scene just stuck in my head, and every time that I hear somebody getting married or, you know, had a baby, I always feel like, you know, I’m somewhat related, because I’m also a woman, a female.

*Hilary:* Okay.

*Kiki:* So, you know, I feel very special about it, and I wanted to, you know, write a paper about it.

It’s unclear what Kiki had written on her laptop (she did not have a hard copy and therefore I do not have a copy of the draft), but a comment Hilary made about it – “It could be a great like introduction to a paper about a mother, because it’s about like the transformation of becoming a mother, having a child, you know” – makes it seem as though Kiki had either recounted the scene she saw while watching TV or another version of it. Whatever Kiki had written, Hilary did not think it adequately responded to the assignment prompt. She said, “You

write, ‘I recall my mother, a kind face with a giggling smile.’ So you sort of– in that sentence you sort of started to paint a picture of your mother, and that’s what I think your professor wants you to do for this part.”

I admire the way that Hilary helps Kiki understand what is being asked of her. Hilary rereads the assignment prompt and points to the single most important phrase in it: “evoke a sensory perception.” Then, without questioning Kiki’s vocabulary, Hilary, as if thinking aloud to herself, instructed, “senses are like, well, you know, the five senses like hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch, so those are like senses. [...] Like when you think of women, like what do you – looking at these different like smell, hearing, sight, touch, like what are some descriptions that like come to your mind when you think of –.” Keeping in mind Kiki’s overall goal of writing about women and mothers, and Davis’s instruction that they should “evoke a sensory perception,” Hilary suggested that she and Kiki should brainstorm about her subject.

*Kiki:* Like kind of soap smell?

*Hilary:* What, soap?

*Kiki:* Soap, yeah.

*Hilary:* Yeah, like women – yeah, and it’s hard, because women is such a broad topic, but, yeah, you could think of like, yeah, soap. You could think of – like you could go –

*Kiki:* Real clean smell like – smell.

*Hilary:* Like, I don’t know. Do you think –

*Kiki:* Soft like – that’s touch, maybe, but –

*Hilary:* Well, you don’t have to just to smell. You can do any, yeah, like touch. Kind of soft, softer skin. I was thinking smell like some women, not all women, wear like perfume, something like that. I don’t know. What else do you think of women?

*Kiki:* Strong and, well, this is not very sense, but –

- Hilary:* Well, just anything. Let's just do what you think about women.
- Kiki:* Okay, and like not magical necessarily, but they know the way it works best. Like, you know –
- Hilary:* Okay.
- Kiki:* Like when we go to our mothers, then they know what to say.
- Hilary:* Okay.
- Kiki:* Not necessarily, like, might not solve problem but make us feel better.
- Hilary:* Okay, feel better. Okay. I'm trying to think. Intelligent could be a word, maybe sensitive?

Hilary suggested that the best way to focus on mothers in this assignment would be for Kiki to write a description of her own mother. “You could like just describe [...] really describe every sort of, you know, sensory image about her,” Hilary encouraged. “I don't know if you want to use your mother, but how you were saying “kind face with a giggling smile,” go into more detail about her facial features or, you know, about the little habits she had like if she, you know, like wringing her hands or – I don't know.” While respectful of these ideas, Kiki still expressed reservations. “To write about my mother, like, should I pick like specific event that happened?” she asks. Hilary replied, “it looks like – I mean, it's hard to say, but it really looks like this is just like sensory detail” and gives an example of her own mother and the specific type of perfume she wears that always reminds Hilary of her. “Now I think I've got it,” Kiki declared and the writing center session concluded.

As the dialogue above suggests, the whole concept of the “portfolio project” is a difficult one for both student and tutor to understand. By studying the prompt, Hilary concluded that Davis was asking for a stand alone description, helped Kiki understand the assignment, and

explained how description, story, and essay differ. Hilary also told Kiki that what she had already composed would be best saved for the later parts of the project. Before Hilary could help Kiki “invent the university,” Hilary herself participated in a similar process. She drew on her three years of college experience which included many writing assignments in order to unpack the assignment’s fundamental requirements. By engaging Kiki in a brainstorming activity and modeling examples to her, Hilary helped Kiki learn how to analyze an assignment and begin writing in response to it.

Kiki’s final draft of this assignment draws upon many of the ideas generated in the writing center. Kiki composes a nearly three page description of her own mother for this assignment. She begins,

What makes a mother so miraculous? Before I begin to dig deep into this interesting topic, I think about my own mother. If I close my eyes, I can clearly see her kind face in my mind. Every night, before I fall asleep, I hear her voice whispering encouraging messages that make me strong. “You don’t have to be the protagonist all the time, sometimes it’s enjoyable being an audience member and observing other peoples’ lives.

The word “protagonist” is strange in this sentence. I suspect that Kiki’s mother would say, “You don’t have to be the hero all the time” and that Kiki ended up with the word “protagonist” when she used her Japanese/English dictionary to find the English equivalent for her mother’s expression. More importantly, this pattern – pieces of advice her mother gave her interwoven with descriptions – continues throughout the text. Kiki’s second paragraph also focuses on her mother’s voice as it “becomes distorted through the computer” (they talk for free over the internet) and how her mother’s “deep sighs” convey to Kiki how much her mother misses her.



In her third paragraph, Kiki moves to smell and invokes an image drawn from the writing center conference with Hilary: “The smell of aloe lotion always reminds me of my mother’s graceful hands gently messaging my stubby fingers, her warmth transferring in to my body.”

Kiki’s attempt at description is fairly successful. Davis makes many comments in the margin that applaud her attention to detail: “good ¶- your description of her hands says a lot about her character.” At one point, Kiki describes her mother’s eyes as ones that “remind me of a fish; his eyes looking deep into the sea. They are washed with all of her experiences; bitterness, joy, struggle, pain, and rejoice.” To this, Davis responds, “This is nicely written, though we don’t usually think of fish eyes as conveying sensitivity and emotion.” Still, Kiki does an admirable job given that less than 24 hours before it was due, she didn’t understand the nature of the assignment.

In this case, the writing center tutor helped the student by starting at the beginning: what does the assignment ask students to do? Kiki’s misunderstanding of the assignment may have stemmed, in part, from her limited knowledge of English. It is more likely, however, that the complex nature of the assignment led to her confusion.

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When students enter college, they face many new challenges. This is particularly true in their composition courses which often ask them to write in ways and for purposes that are unfamiliar to them. Pamela – who I introduced in Chapter 2 – told me during our first interview that she thought teachers assigned writing primarily to determine whether or not students had completed their reading assignments, to hold them accountable for a course’s content. Although neither Michelle nor Kiki expressed this understanding of writing, they did both struggle to understand what the assignments they were given required of them and how to accomplish those

tasks. After their tutorials, Kiki and Michelle both incorporated ideas they had generated with their tutors into the revisions of their papers, an indication that peer tutors play a role in helping students begin to swim – or at least float in - the unfamiliar university waters.

Nevertheless, elements of each session concern me. Hilary ultimately helped Kiki understand the assignment, but she never seriously considered Kiki's request that they find a way to work with the idea of a mother giving birth. It seems possible that Kiki could have successfully completed this assignment by describing the vivid images of the woman giving birth on the Discovery Channel. It is true that Kiki does not have first-hand knowledge of the smells and feelings associated with childbirth, but during the session she began to describe what she saw and heard on the program. Her imagination may have filled in the rest: how do ice chips taste and feel in the mouth of a woman in labor? how does the skin of a newborn feel and smell? Hilary encouraged Kiki to describe a mother – perhaps her own – of whom she had first-hand knowledge and it was, I think, a fair choice. But it may not have been Kiki's only option, and I find it problematic that Hilary did not attempt to help Kiki do what she repeatedly said she wanted to do: to write about a woman giving birth.

James took a similarly directive approach and at times sounded more like a teacher would than like a peer would. This seemed to make Michelle feel unsure of herself even though one goal of peer tutoring is to inspire confidence. James told Michelle what she might do – “you could focus on this sort of double nature of reality between what's more honest and sort of true versus what's more actually happening” – rather than allowing Michelle's own words and intentions to guide her revision. Herein lays one difficulty with peer tutoring. Even though James is an undergraduate – technically Michelle's peer – he is a senior and has had three full years of education that Michelle has not. Upon reading Michelle's paper, James identified what could

make the paper more “ideal” and imposed that impression on Michelle. Given the disparity between James’s authority as a writer and Michelle’s, it is understandable why Michelle allows James’s ideas (as opposed to her own) to guide their discussion and her revision.

But tutors and tutoring are not perfect. The two sessions discussed in this chapter illustrate that peer tutors can help students understand what assignments ask them to do and point out where their “bluffs” have failed. The former, in particular, is work that most instructors take for granted. The assignments Michelle’s and Kiki’s instructors asked them to complete have little in common, but both pose challenges for their respective writers because, for different reasons, they are not quite ready to do what is asked of them. Bartholomae argues that “students will need to learn to crudely mimic the ‘distinctive register’ of academic discourse before they are prepared to actually and legitimately do the work of the discourse” (83). In language that resonates with Bartholomae’s, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz explain that first-year students “are asked to develop expertise in new subjects and methodologies, while still learning how to handle the tools of these disciplines and decipher their user’s manuals” (132). This observation is consistent with the experiences of Kiki and Michelle: neither felt they possessed the tools they needed to fully accomplish their assignments.

Gary Davis actually designed his course with mimicry and “tools” in mind: students read haiku and then composed their own (mimicry). For the descriptive essay assignment (explained above), Kiki and her classmates were asked to apply what they had learned about descriptive language in their haiku assignment (arguably a “tool”) to a different kind of description. Even though mimicry and tools were, in theory, a part of Kiki’s course, she struggled to apply what she had learned in one situation to another, instead falling back into the narrative genre she found more familiar.

The problem Michelle faced was that although her writing is “clean” and makes many of the right “moves,” she is, as Bartholomae argues, trying to assume privilege when she doesn’t have any. Based on the data from the Harvard Study, Sommers and Saltz complicate Bartholomae’s argument and suggest that “‘assuming privilege’ means, often, admitting what you do not know, rather than pretending to possess expertise” (148). During the writing center session, James kindly “calls Michelle’s bluff”; from there, he helps her figure out what she does not know and validates that what she thinks is important.

Bartholomae, Harris, and Sommers and Saltz all discuss the difficulty that students face when they attempt to write themselves into the academy. The data I collected for this study echoes the urgency of their arguments. In terms of tutor training, the fact that tutors are called upon to help students figure out what assignments ask them to do calls upon tutor trainers to remind tutors of the important role tutors play in helping students acclimate to the university. In the two cases I present in this chapter, tutors helped students invent the university for themselves by modeling how to read in order to understand an assignment’s requirements and by modeling how to unpack – rather than cover up – the complexities that students confront in the texts they read.

Michelle and Kiki (and the other five students in this case study) are “novice” writers. That is, they adopted “an open attitude to experiment, whether in course selection or paper topics, and a faith that, with practice and guidance, the new expectations of college can be met” (Sommers and Saltz 134). The very fact that Michelle and Kiki used the writing center as often as they did suggests that they recognized their status as “novice” writers and thus turned to tutors for guidance as they revised their work. Many tutors are trained to attend to problematically defined higher-order (content-related) and lower-order (error-related) concerns. But for Michelle

and Kiki, the “concern” that needed attention during these tutorials was, to some degree, pre-“content.” In their cases, revision involved not only distinguishing between higher- and lower-order concerns, but began with tutors helping them determine the nature of the “concern” raised by an assignment itself: what am I being asked to do and how do I accomplish it? Although it is unlikely that neither Kiki nor Michelle would name it such, I would argue that these sessions illustrate students engaged in the act of revision, in the act of reevaluating what they have been asked to do and of rethinking the options they have for writing.

#### 4.0 SOMETHING LARGER: TUTORING THAT FOSTERS REVISION

It should go without saying that writing centers are places where tutors help students revise their work. But few have said it so bluntly.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the unwillingness to say that tutors and students work on revising papers – or, perhaps more precisely, on improving their written products – stems from Stephen North’s famous pronouncement that writing centers make “better writers, not better writing.” Near the end of Chapter 1, I quoted a lengthy passage from North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center,” an essay published prominently in *College English*. North later wrote of his article that it “offered a version of what we do that is in its own way very attractive, but one which also, to the extent that it is a romantic idealization, presents its own kind of jeopardy” (“Revisiting ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’” 81). Writing in *The Writing Center Journal* about a decade after the publication of the first essay, North reflected that the “endorsement” of “The Idea of a Writing Center” has made it difficult for writing center administrators and tutors to “disown or renounce what may be its less desirable legacies” (82).

In “Revisiting ‘The Idea of a Writing Center,’” then, North quotes from four earlier passages and offers a new perspective on them. For example, North examines the following claim: “Writers come looking for us because, more often than not, they are genuinely, deeply

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Welch is an exception. In *Getting Restless*, she writes, “a campus writing center [...] according to our current models and theories, is designed to promote revision as opportunity, seeks to offer a genuinely ‘collaborative’ and ‘libratory’ experience of writing and learning.”

engaged with their material, anxious to wrestle in it to the best form they can: they are really motivated to write” (443).

When he revisits this claim, North admits that audiences of writing center directors frequently laugh when he reads it aloud to them. North maintains that “It isn’t, of course, that the writers we see – students, for the most part – *aren’t* motivated. They are. But not in the uncomplicated way this passage would suggest” (82, emphasis retained). North then suggests that students’ motivations for visiting the writing center are often more pragmatic – to finish the writing, to earn a good grade, to impress their instructors – than the passage above suggests. North argues that revising the earlier statement is important for many reasons, one of which is that for tutors “it does come as a shock when, having been led by your training to expect some deep, unalloyed, genuine engagement – some eager wrestler-of-texts – you meet instead a frightened freshman who seems only to want a super proofreader” (83). He concludes that the original passage may have had “strategic value for other purposes” but that it “can lay an unnecessarily heavy burden on such tutors” (83).

North revisits three other passages in his essay, rereading them and offering useful complications to his original assertions. However, North does not reevaluate his assertion that writing centers make “better writers, not better writing,” an assertion that I think has led to what may be the article’s most undesirable legacy: the tendency of writing center research to overlook the writing brought into and that develops from writing center tutorials.

I would argue that the binary – writers vs. writing – is a false one. Writing – or the promise of writing – is always on the table during a tutoring session. As the writing center sessions I discussed in Chapter 3 illustrate, sometimes the tutorial focuses on the writer more than the writing that she brought with her. But if students who visited the writing center didn’t

think that, at some level, the writing they have immediately at hand was improved by – or they were able to improve their writing given – the time invested in the writing center tutorial, they wouldn't come back. And students do come back to DePauw's writing center.<sup>24</sup>

The binary – improving writers vs. improving writing, focus on process vs. focus on product – has, I think, led writing center scholars to neglect to study the impact that tutoring sessions have on student writing, specifically the revisions they make to their papers. The insistence that writing centers improve writers rather than writing has also meant that few have studied the writing that students produce with tutors' help. Tutors at DePauw's writing center have noted the frustration they feel over not knowing how students' papers turn out after they leave the writing center. In her paper "Get Feedback!" at the 1999 National Writing Center Conference, Nici Kuhn, then a peer tutor and classmate of mine at DePauw reflected, "Many times when a student leaves a tutoring session I find myself quite anxious about the essay, wondering what the professor will think of it or if the student will make any changes at all." Of course writing centers want to help students become better, more confident writers; they do so by working with specific writing assignments which they intend to help students improve. A writing center would not exist in a place that thought of writing only as a product; but even though writing centers are tools of process writing models, they almost always work on the writers vis-à-vis their writing.

This study allowed me to collect and study the writing students brought with them to the writing center and the draft (or drafts) that were produced afterward. Having this data allows me to study one aspect of the processes – the writing center conferences – and the products – the "final" drafts – of these nine students. It also allows me to illustrate *how* writing centers help

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<sup>24</sup> Of the nine students who participated in this study, only two visited the writing center just once. This proportion compares favorably with the overall rate of multiple visits by students at DePauw.



facilitate revision rather than relying on powerful, but ultimately unsubstantiated platitudes about the role writing centers play in revision like this one from Thom Hawkins when he directed the writing center at Berkeley:

The truly discursive nature of the talk between tutor and tutee is, I would argue, at the heart of learning how to revise, how to refine thoughts from draft to draft. Students learn that revision involves much more than mechanically correcting errors, that it is a recursive process concerned primarily with shaping ideas into suitable form. (Hawkins 67)

I do not disagree with anything Hawkins says above. I, too, would argue that learning how to revise stems from the conversations students and tutors have with one another. However, Hawkins fails to offer examples drawn from tutorials and/or drafts and revisions that illustrate his claims.

I would agree, also, with Hawkins's tutors who "often write in their journals about how important it is to build confidence in tutees so that they will have the courage and self-assurance it takes to make substantive revisions. [...]They won't have the confidence to make changes, to revise, if they don't know what is expected of them" (Hawkins 67). In the two examples in Chapter 3, confidence did play a significant role in the students' abilities to compose and/or revise their compositions. Kiki, for example, came to the writing center unsure about what the assignment asked her to do. Hilary's patient explanation of what it means to "evoke a sensory perception" and her affirmation that Kiki was on the right track by the session's end did, in fact, give Kiki the confidence to revise her concept of Portfolio Assignment 1. Michelle understood the assignment, but because she views herself as a "weak writer," one of the most important things James could do was encourage her about the things she had done effectively: incorporate

quotes, provide solid and interesting analysis. Knowing what she had done well and having a plan to revise those things that needed work gave Michelle the confidence to revise her paper.

But confidence is not the only issue that brings students to the writing center, nor is it the only factor that causes students to revise. Carol Trupiano, a contributor to *Revision: History, Theory and Practice*, asserts that at some universities, a writing center's most important role is that it "guarantees that all papers have been through at least one revision" (186). My study's data suggests no such thing: a writing center session guarantees only that a student and a tutor have talked about the student's writing project. Sometimes students leave the writing center and make no changes to their work. There are reasons why this is the case. More frequently, students do make changes to their papers, changes that stem from the conference. But writing center scholarship offers little evidence of the revisions that they claim tutors helps students make. In the following section, I provide four examples of revisions that students make after they have visited the writing center. I chose these four student papers and associated tutorials because they reflect a range of tutoring styles, a range of levels of student engagement, and a range of revision. Together, they paint a fairly representative portrait of the tutorials I observed during the Fall 2006 semester.

More factors than I can possibly address influence what kinds of revisions students make to their writing after a writing center session. However, the sessions I discuss in this chapter suggest some of the factors that influence the degree of revision students undertake. For example, when students are invested in the assignment and the changes they discuss with their tutors, the degree of revision can be quite substantial. On the other hand, students who visit the writing center the night before a paper is due seem less likely to make significant changes to their papers. The data I collected also suggests that when students feel comfortable with their

tutors – when they have developed a familiarity with tutors – they are more likely to accept that tutor’s authority; however, sometimes that confidence in a tutor can lead students to doubt their own authority as writers.

As important as the findings from individual sessions are, the more important finding, I think, is the complex nature of the process of revision that can be ascertained from paying attention to students pre- and post-tutorial drafts. The examples I analyze suggest that less revision occurs when tutors talk more than students, that sometimes revision makes a paper less effective than its original, and that more than one tutorial for a given paper has benefits and limitations.

#### **4.1 REVISION AND STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD TUTOR FEEDBACK**

James, the experienced senior tutor who worked with Michelle in Chapter 3, tutored on Thursday and Sunday evenings during the Fall 2006 semester. These two evenings are typically among the busiest because so many papers are due on Monday (because teachers want students to have the weekend to work on them) or on Friday (so that students don’t have a paper looming over the weekend). James’s hours meant that he tutored many of the participants in my study, some of them more than once. The following two sessions, in both of which James was the tutor, reveal how the ideas generated with a given tutor can lead to either a fairly extensive revision or to no revision at all (and surely everything in between). As my analysis of these two sessions and the revised papers will show, the difference appears to be how invested the student is in the suggestions the tutor offers: the more collaborative the session, the more extensive the revision.

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Michelle brought her third paper to the writing center just before the university's Thanksgiving break in November. There were several options for the assignment in Schmidt's class, but all asked students to engage with Sherman Alexie's novel *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* which they had just finished reading. Michelle chose to write on the following topic:

In "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor," Alexie creates a character whose compulsive joking has detrimental effects on his marriage. Write an essay in which you explore the function and effects of humor in Alexie's prose.

**FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE TOPICS YOU WILL HAVE TO FORMULATE A SUCCINCT THESIS AND SUPPORT AND DEVELOP IT. CHOOSE TWO OR THREE STORIES THAT BEST SUIT YOUR PURPOSE AND CLOSELY ENGAGE WITH THEM IN YOUR ARGUMENTATION. REFLECT ON OUR CLASS DISCUSSIONS.**

In her introduction, Michelle explains that Alexie writes "fictionalized stories" about growing up on a reservation that are drawn from his personal experience. Alexie infuses these stories with humor she claims, "not only to entertain the audience, but also to bring light to many serious issues contributing to the disintegration of the Indian community." This final perceptive statement serves as Michelle's argument and is the most interesting thesis statement she had crafted during the semester: Michelle perceived that Alexie uses humor almost ironically in order to highlight the tragedy suffered by a whole group of people.

This observation is rather astute; she never uses the word "ironic" in her paper, but she essentially discovered and claimed that Alexie uses humor to highlight trouble. In later paragraphs, Michelle incorporates interesting examples, but the paper has a choppy feeling:

humor highlights alcoholism; moreover, it highlights discrimination; furthermore, poverty; and finally, family values have gone by the wayside, too. This choppieness calls to mind a comment Schmidt wrote on one of Michelle's earlier papers, that she should refrain from "listing" her points. Some of Michelle's analysis is rock solid, but at other moments, the impact of the humor is less well articulated.

The body paragraphs thus highlight Michelle's best writing qualities – thoughtful analysis – and lingering weaknesses: examples that seem disconnected from the thesis and weak transitions between ideas. One of the best analytical moments in the paper comes in the fifth paragraph when Michelle discusses the story of Jimmy and Norma as they drive home and are stopped by a state trooper. Michelle argues that they maintain control of the situation by making fun of the officer who essentially bribes them. Their good nature, Michelle claims, "strengthens feelings of pity for the couple, and feelings of disgust for the trooper." This analysis of the scene is among the strongest analysis in the entire paper.

In another paragraph that displays Michelle's keen insights, she returns to the thrust of her thesis: "Alexie also demonstrates how the hardships of Indian life were having a toll on tribal values." She presents examples to illustrate this point in the next two paragraphs, and the example in this paragraph is persuasive. She quotes from a story about a child whose only relative, his grandfather, cannot take care of him because of his excessive drinking and sexual behavior. Michelle means to suggest that tribal values are clearly changing for the worse when a relative chooses his drinking and sexual habits over caring for a child, but she does not articulate this point. Rather, she concludes this paragraph weakly, saying, "Alexie makes a sarcastic remark about the man who should be taking care" of an innocent child.

Similarly, in the penultimate paragraph, Michelle draws on the story of Nezy and the mouse. In this story, a mouse, apparently scared by the “tremendous fart” Nezy’s son released (77), runs up Nezy’s leg. Her sons find this immensely funny. Neither her sons nor her husband will help her; instead, they laugh. Michelle suggests that Nezy’s husband’s and sons’ reactions are cold, heartless, and incompatible with traditional Native American values. She writes, “This gives another example of how Alexie utilizes comical situations to show how easy it had become to upset a whole family.” Although Michelle interprets quotations well, she struggles to suggest the relevance of examples to her larger point, in this case, to degenerating family values.

In the conclusion, Michelle returns to the idea that comedy and humor are used to help the Native Americans “feel better about the hardships they had to endure living on the reservation.” She continues, “Alexie [...] does not use humor to help heal personal wounds. Alexie uses his humor to do exactly the opposite: bring attention to them.” This is a strongly worded, interesting conclusion in which Michelle introduces a new idea – that humor exposes personal wounds – drawn directly from the arguments made in the body of her paper. This statement could easily be a thesis statement, but it follows nicely from the central assertions made in the paper and might have been meant to satisfy her teacher’s desire to read something “surprising” in the conclusion.

As my summary of Michelle’s paper suggests, many of her assertions are interesting and strong. But there are a few weaknesses, most importantly that her thesis statement, while strong, does not apply to the whole paper; in Schmidt’s language, it is not “over-arching.” She does not persuasively show that Native American family values have degenerated because she does not foreground that this is what we are supposed to see by the examples provided. Some of

Michelle's analysis is vague, her transitions are sometimes weak, and a few paragraphs seem superfluous.

Before Michelle took her paper to the writing center, she made a handful of changes, some to portions of the paper that I thought were particularly strong. For example, she changed her analysis of the state trooper scene and asserted that it inspires readers not to feel *pity* for the couple but to feel *fondness* toward them. The distinction is minor, perhaps. But, Michelle goes on: "If Alexie had chosen to not use humor and had instead had the couple react with violence, the story would not be as effective in portraying the unfairness of the situation." I find this line of reasoning unconvincing. Michelle's arguments, when grounded within the text, are interesting and persuasive, but when she moves to moments where she hypothesizes what *might* have happened *if* Alexie had done something else, she grabs at straws. Michelle also deletes the paragraph about the drunk and sexed grandfather, a section I thought could best make her point about the changing values on the reservation.

In the writing center, Michelle worked with James for the second time. Because many of Schmidt's students used the writing center, James had already read another student's paper that dealt with the same topic. Michelle's paper essentially addressed the effects Alexie's humor has on readers/audience. Within this general topic, she had set the paper up to focus on something really interesting: the way that humor highlights problems endured by people on the reservation. James understands her argument and compliments it, but he senses there is a problem with what he calls "organization."

*James:* You've got a lot of good points. I think we could work on some organization issues though. The first thing, I guess, you said a lot about how by making it humorous he has a more effective way of portraying the problems. I guess, why do you think that?

To show Michelle where she said that Alexie uses humor to portray the problems, James read from her paper: “If Alexie had chosen to not use humor and had instead had the couple react with violence, the story would not be as effective in portraying the unfairness of the situation.” This passage reveals the problem with positing what might have been. Michelle, rather than dealing with what the story actually says and how she interprets what it says, is trying to hypothesize about what might have happened if the characters had done something different. Although James did not explain the problem with “would be’s,” by asking Michelle to further articulate why she thought this was the case, he encouraged her to assert her ideas based on the text itself. She explained:

*Michelle:* In that specific story, having the couple react with humor, it made the readers feel more sympathetic towards them. This is hard to put into words...I’m trying to figure out what I’m thinking here...when he uses humor, if he didn’t use humor it would just drone on about all the problems. And like by using humor it keeps the audience entertained. No one wants to read a story that’s all just talking about problems.

James translated Michelle’s “thinking out loud” into a succinct sentence: “So the humor makes it more entertaining. It makes the [readers] more sympathetic toward the characters. Is there anything else?”

*Michelle:* It like makes you pay more attention. You have to think about why you found it funny. In searching for why you found it funny, you have to think about the problems.

*James:* That’s a really good point. I think you have good examples in here; I think if you break this up into he uses humor to make characters more sympathetic; make the story more entertaining; show the problems more clearly. And then you have it broken into each section and then you can have conclusion sentences and won’t be repeating yourself quite as much. I think you have all of the examples here so you won’t need too much more work.



As this dialogue indicates, James pushed Michelle to articulate her main ideas about humor's effect so that they began to develop a framework around which to organize her paper. By "organization" James partially meant the arrangement of the paragraphs, and partially that there did not seem to be a logical grouping of the issues raised by the body paragraphs. In other words, James, too, sensed that Michelle was simply "listing" her points without tying them together or to her overall argument.

It is interesting to me that during the session, the two never discussed Michelle's thesis statement: "In this novel, Alexie's humor works not only to entertain his readers, but also to bring light to many serious issues contributing to the disintegration of the Native American community." One question the thesis statement begs is, "what evidence is there that the Native American community is disintegrating?" Though Michelle pointed to some of the more obvious problems on the reservation – alcoholism, unemployment, discrimination, abject poverty – she never articulated that these problems are the evidence of that disintegration. Michelle could have made a very interesting argument about this and might, in fact, have been only a paragraph or two away from it.

Rather than focusing on the claim Michelle asserts in her thesis, James focused on "humor" (perhaps because of its prominence in the prompt) and asked Michelle to again articulate how humor functions. They end up with a "three-pronged" answer and then determined what paragraphs from her draft fit each of humor's functions. They never returned to the thesis statement and how it would have to be tweaked given the new foci of the body paragraphs. However, Michelle attended to this herself.

In the final, revised paper, Michelle's introduction remains largely the same, though she does alter her thesis statement slightly. Because she never really addressed the declining values

of the Native Americans, she drops this from her thesis. Instead, she now claims, “Alexie’s humor works not only to entertain his readers, but also to bring light to many serious issues within the Native American community and generate feelings of sympathy for the characters.” This thesis statement now fits what the body of her paper asserts more closely and aligns with what James and Michelle discussed during the session. It remains an interesting thesis which suggests that humor has a dark side. That Michelle tweaks it even though she and James did not discuss doing so suggests that Michelle is learning to read her own papers from a critical distance.

Michelle rearranges her paper significantly. For example, she moves what was the ninth paragraph to the beginning, inverting the whole order of the paper. This paragraph – about Nezy and the mouse – was formerly used to suggest that the family values on the reservation had become rocky. But in this revised version, the example suggests that some humor is present simply for its entertainment value: “The unusual, humorous essence of this story will make it not only stand out, but be remembered by the readers.” The revision strikes me as weak because I am not sure that Michelle needs to convince us that Alexie’s text is humorous: Schmidt’s prompt asserts that it is. Michelle’s examination of the effect the humor has on the audience is less persuasive than her description of how the humor affects the characters themselves.

In the next section of her paper, Michelle discusses how Alexie’s humor exposes the reservation’s hardships. Although some of her language in the transitional paragraph is vague, she does improve her analysis of alcoholism and the jokes told about it. In this revised version, she more closely analyzes the language used in the quotes she chose. The following examples illustrate this specificity:

### Draft

Alexie points out how predominant a problem alcoholism is within his community by using one of his characters to make a joke about it. When talking about the community as a whole, another one of Alexie's characters states that "when a glass sits on a table [at the reservation], people don't wonder if it's half filled or half empty. They just hope it's good beer" (49). The humor in [this statement] makes the readers laugh; however, it also forces them to pay attention to the underlying issue of alcoholism.

### Revision

Alexie points out how predominant a problem alcoholism is within his community. When talking about the community as a whole, another one of Alexie's characters states, "When a glass sits on a table [at the reservation], people don't wonder if it's half filled or half empty. They just hope it's good beer" (49). *Typically, people that view a glass as half full as opposed to half empty are expected to be more optimistic than pessimistic. However, Alexie's character is simply stating that it does not matter what kind of person someone is: all types of people on the reservation, whether pessimistic or optimistic will be content as long as they have a good beer.*

Michelle had realized that the ending to the original paragraph was weak, going so far as to write "Do I need a stronger concluding sentence?" on the draft that she took to the writing center. In the revision, the examples Michelle uses successfully illustrate how the jokes highlight the predominant problem of alcoholism.

The nature of the revisions to the other paragraphs are similar: in many cases, Michelle strengthens her analysis and does a better job of writing transitions that build upon each other and tie back to the previous paragraphs. The final draft feels more connected and less list-like than the previous draft. Still, I think the draft of the paper – especially the first draft with the example of the irresponsible grandfather – held greater potential than the final draft exhibits. This paper is not bad; in fact, it's fairly interesting. The problem, for me, is that the best point – the one about humor highlighting a darker side to life on the reservation – is buried in the middle of the paper. Some would say to lead with the strongest point and others would say to build to

it.<sup>25</sup> Either of these would be more effective, I think, than sticking the strongest example in the middle of the paper where its impact is least significant.

As with any paper, there were multiple options for revising this paper, for directions it could take. James' strategy was to find a way to organize the paper and name the function of the paragraphs. Michelle did a good job of tweaking the thesis statement to fit the new organization. My question is this: why not start with Michelle's thesis statement? What did she *want* to do? The argument imagined in the draft was more ambitious than the argument posed in the final draft. And, following the thesis as it was in the draft may not have lead Michelle down the "if" path that she continues to take in the final draft.

Although this paper is not as ambitious as it might have been, this tutorial illustrates how, when a tutor and student arrive at a revision strategy together, the degree of revision can be substantial. James opened the session by telling Michelle that she had made some good points but asks her to clarify her thinking about a central claim. By allowing Michelle to talk at the beginning of the session, James reinforced that the paper is hers and she must direct its revision.

Michelle and James discussed little to none of the specific rewording that takes place. Michelle was enthusiastic about the reorganization, and that translated into her making significant changes to the organization and to the transitional sentences that support the organization. Moreover, it leads her to rethink her thesis statement even though James never mentioned it. The session suggests that when students are invested in the work done in the writing center, when they agree with tutors' assessments of their drafts' strengths and

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<sup>25</sup> For example, two textbooks known for their emphasis on rhetorical strategies for arguments offer advice about the placement of evidence. In *Everything's an Argument*, Andrea Lunsford writes, "In many cases it makes sense to lead with a strong piece of evidence or striking example to get readers interested in your subject and then to conclude with the strongest evidence" (197). Similarly, in *Reading Critically Writing Well*, Rise B. Axelrod suggests, "writers of position papers often end with the strongest reasons because this organization gives the best reasons the greatest emphasis" (639).

weaknesses, they may be empowered to revise their papers extensively. The result of such a tutorial is not a perfect paper, but often a different paper with a refined intention or means of persuasion.

But students are not always invested in the strategies tutors suggest. Such was the case when James tutored Max. Unlike many of the students in my case study, Max knew exactly what he wanted to study when he enrolled at DePauw: economics. Max was one of about 30 first-year students selected for the Management Fellows program. Founded in 1980, Management Fellows is “a four-year learning experience integrating the study of management with the liberal arts. Fellows complete courses in business ethics, economics, and accounting, along with specially designed seminars on personal and career assessment, which provide the academic foundation for exploring management” (“Management Fellows”). In addition to wanting to major in economics, Max told me, “I’m not an English person.” Nevertheless, Max expressed certainty that writing is important. When I asked him to describe the writing he did in high school, he could remember very little about it, perhaps a sign that English and writing classes did not engage him.

*Margaret:* Did you write much in high school?

*Max:* It was a joke. I was in straight honors courses throughout high school. [...] I took ACP English through IUSB.<sup>26,27</sup> [...] That was the first time I was ever taught how to put together a paper.

Learning “how to put a paper together” was important to Max. Although he told me “I really forget” what he learned about writing in ACP English, he did recall that it was the first time a teacher explained how to structure a paper with three main ideas and a thesis statement.

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 2, Note 11.

<sup>27</sup> Indiana University-South Bend.

Because he considered himself good at coming up with content, it was the more mechanical issues Max thought should be the focus of a composition course. By the end of his College Writing class, Max was surprised, and perhaps disappointed, by how little time he thought Davis spent discussing such “mechanical” issues.

While Max asserted that he rarely struggles to come up with content, other comments he made suggest that this may not be entirely accurate. During our first interview, I asked him about the two assignments they had already been given. For the first – a series of four thematically linked haiku – Max told me he began by going to the internet: “I typed in ‘groups of four,’” he admitted. The most interesting “group of four” that he found was the Greek elements – earth, air, fire, and water – so he crafted a set of haiku around them. Many students use the internet as a starting place for assignments of various kinds, but going to the internet for ideas about content suggests that generating ideas is not something that comes as easily to Max as he suggested.

At the time of our first interview, Max was just beginning his second assignment – the editing of Emily Dickinson’s “The Spider Holds a Silver Ball” – and seemed particularly nervous about coming up with what to say about the choices he made as he edited it. “I read the poem...I have no idea what it is about,” he said with a laugh. To figure out what the poem is about, Max, again, “went to the internet” only to discover that there are no summaries of it. “I have no idea how I’m going to write 2½ pages about it,” he said. A few minutes earlier Max confidently asserted that coming up with content is a strength, but when we began to discuss his college writing assignments, Max seemed unsure of how to begin when presented with these specific assignments. But once pushed, Max did say he thought he would leave “The Spider Holds a Silver Ball” largely untouched because Emily Dickinson must have written it the way she did “for a reason.” Max seemed to understand that saying “she did it for a reason” was not a

substantial enough justification for his editing choices, but early in the semester, he understood less well how to craft a persuasive justification.

Max visited the writing center with some regularity until midterm; he visited only once after that. He seemed turned off by the writing center after a session with James on October 8. After that tutorial, he used the writing center only once more and told me he didn't plan to go back because he "received bad grades" whenever he used its services. During the October 8 session, Max was working on the second portion of his portfolio project for Prof. Davis. The assignment was presented this way:

At this stage, examine your subject from a critical perspective, forming an inquiry or a more clearly defined argument. Identify a controversy or uncertainty associated with your subject and move, like Montaigne, toward a more informed and reasoned understanding. As in your own short essays, you should resist or undermine conventional assumptions. In general, expand or challenge what your readers think they know about your subject. Although you are not required to do so, you may enhance your argument with some external research.

At the beginning of the session, Max seemed flustered:

*James:* Okay.

*Max:* And I've been stuck on this paper, so it's not done. I'm like halfway done but I have like the introduction done. I have the introduction and like this paragraph is just kinda like background, and then I have like three different like points.

And I have one of the three done, another two are listed and then part of the conclusion, but like – can you just like – 'cause like you see how it has to be like argumentative but like you can also kinda just pick out like a –

*James:* Yeah, so what's the subject? I guess what did you –?

*Max:* Oh, I'm writing about like – I'm doing golf [...]

*James:* Okay.

*Max:* So could you see like if I'm on the right start?

At the outset of the conference, Max told James that he struggled with this assignment and, as a result, hadn't finished with his paper. He had an introduction and one example written. Based on the draft of the paper, Max planned that the paper would have six parts:

*Part One:* Description of a stereotypical golfer followed by the claim that "it is indisputable that golf has a stereotype, but over the past decade the game has been changing and improving its image." 1 paragraph.

*Part Two:* Historical understanding of the stereotypes associated with golfers (i.e. rich white men). 1 paragraph.

*Part Three:* First stereotype undergoing change: Women golfers. 2 paragraphs.

*Part Four:* Second stereotype undergoing change: Race and Tiger Woods's influence on game. Undrafted.

*Part Five:* Third stereotype undergoing change: Who is playing game – age and socioeconomic class? – plus an introduction of programs like "First Tee." Undrafted.

*Conclusion:* "Golf needs to be a game in which everyone regardless of sex, ethnicity, and beliefs are equally accepted." 1 paragraph.

Although this paper will have more than five paragraphs, Max set the paper up along the lines of the five paragraph theme; the difference was that he intended to include a paragraph about who golfed historically and to have more than one paragraph to discuss each of his three main examples about who is changing the game and in what ways.



Keeping the requirements of the assignment in mind, it seems like Max understood what he was supposed to be doing: “examine your subject from a critical perspective”; “identify a controversy or uncertainty associated with your subject and move [...] toward a more informed and reasoned understanding.” Max identified a problem he saw within the sport of golf, namely that it has historically been regarded as a wealthy white man’s sport. The first question is whether or not this problem constitutes a “controversy” or an “uncertainty.” It may, but Max never explicitly stated why this stereotype of golfers presents a problem and what that problem is. Does Max think that golf ought to remain a sport for wealthy white men? Or, if he thinks more diverse people ought to play, it is unclear whether or not that perspective is a material one (e.g. in order to sustain the number and quality of golf courses, more individuals have to be drawn to the sport), one born out of the love of the game (e.g. golf is such a great, life-long sport that everyone ought to have the opportunity to play), or out of some other reason. In other words, Max never explicitly states the controversy that arises from the stereotype that we associate with golfers.

The assignment also called on students to practice the techniques they discussed in relation to assigned reading by Montaigne: “resist or undermine conventional assumptions”; “expand or challenge what your readers think they know about your subject”; “enhance your argument with some external research.” This is primarily what Max did in his paper: he tried to undermine the “conventional” or stereotypical assumption that golf is a sport for and played by rich white men. His body paragraphs attempt to expand readers’ conceptions of who plays golf by drawing on some of the most famous players: Tiger Woods, Michelle Wie, and Annika Sorenstam. The external research that Max drew upon was limited but helpful, especially in the section where he described the historical roots of golf and golfers.

As I read Max's paper, I found myself interested in the potential of the paper, but rather bored by its current state. The argument he set up – during the past decade, the game of golf has been changing and improving its image – is fairly bland. It reads more like the introduction to a report. If I were commenting on this paper in draft form, I might use the analogy of an “Olympic Dive” with this student. That is to say that a diver has at her disposal a whole range of dives, some of them harder than others. Before she dives, she tells the judges what dive she is attempting. Each dive has a level of difficulty associated with it: the harder the dive, the higher the points she can earn for it. An easy dive well executed may, in fact, earn a diver fewer points than a hard dive that is a bit sloppy. In other words, like divers, writers must strike a balance between attempting to argue something difficult and being able to do it well.<sup>28</sup>

Max's draft makes it clear that he is capable of identifying some of the problems that have arisen out of the historical image of golfers, but he has not yet articulated what is at stake in reexamining these assumptions. In other words, he's performing a low-level dive fairly well. Still, it is not an interesting paper and, based on the guidelines printed in the syllabus, it only marginally meets its requirements. James began the tutorial with this concern.

*James:* You've got a lot of good points in here but I guess the one thing that jumps out at me, like you're supposed to be identifying a controversy kind of thing. What would you say is a controversy you're dealing with?

*Max:* Just like the stereotype, like social opinion.

*James:* Okay, so like a controversy, you could think – like if this would be an argumentative paper, there's probably an issue where, you know, there are two sides to it like opinion sides. So what are the two sides to the issue that you're looking at? [...]

*Max:* Well, I'm just trying to like argue that like it's like – it's – the game is changing and like it's not – pretty much just that the game's changing.

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<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Susan Hahn for sharing this analogy with me.

*James:* Okay. I think – I mean that’s a good point to make, I think, but I’m not sure if that’s exactly what the professor’s looking for in terms of, you know, an argumentative paper on a controversial issue. [...]

Like you want to write a paper that somebody who disagrees with you is gonna be able to read it and be like, “Oh, well, you know, this is the opposite position of what I have and stuff,” and like I’m not sure if I see somebody being like, you know, “No, golf isn’t changing.”

But what stuck out to me is that you have a bunch of issues that I think are controversies. First, when I first started reading it, I immediately thought of this about, you know, whether Augusta should be forced to allow women. Like that’s a big controversy in golf. I think when you talked about Michelle Wie playing on the PGA tour; I think that’s a big controversy in golf.

Given the questions Max asked, the fact that he said that he struggled with this paper, and his general discomfort (evidenced by his stuttering), it seemed like Max wanted direct, concrete guidance. This was certainly what James interpreted Max’s signals to mean, for when he finished reading the paper, he went to the heart of the prompt and asked two direct questions: what controversy have you identified and what argument are you trying to make? Max could answer both of these questions – the controversy is the image society has of golfers and the argument is that the game is changing – but James told Max in a fairly straightforward way that these are weak controversies and arguments: “Like you want to write a paper that somebody who disagrees with you is gonna be able to read it and be like, ‘Oh, well, you know, this is the opposite position of what I have and stuff,’ and ‘I’m not sure if I see somebody being like, you know, ‘No, golf isn’t changing.’”

Though Max conceded that he understood James’s point, he also maintained that he wanted to argue that golf is changing. He said repeatedly that he couldn’t fill six pages with “the women and golf controversy.” Nonetheless, Max admitted, again, that as he was writing, he wasn’t sure he was on the right track: “That’s what I kept thinking as I was writing. I was like

this isn't like what [Davis is] looking for." Given Max's repeated claims that he didn't think he was on the right track, James took an active, directive role and offered many suggestions about what could be expanded, about possible thesis statements, and about counter-arguments, all of which he thought would have brought the paper more in line with what the assignment asked for.

*Max:* But then like I couldn't write six pages about women in golf, so like I don't know – [...] But like if I could somehow like incorporate like women in golf and like African Americans so I could talk about Tiger Woods and how he's doing. Like if there's some way I could tie like two points together, I'd be fine.

*James:* Okay. I think – I mean – do you think maybe if you tied together – I think if you talk about women in golf and if you talked both about the Augusta controversy and about women playing on the PGA, do you think that could be enough? I think there's a lot of information.

[...]

*Max:* Okay.

*James:* 'Cause I think maybe, yeah, saying that – I mean I think the ideal – well, in some ways, the most coherent paper would be if you just picked one and argued it, but I think you also could work it with some kinda argument that women need to be more included in men's golf or that we need to break down the gender barriers in golf or something like that and that –

*Max:* Well, could I argue that we need to break down like the barriers of golf and then – [...]. I could tie in like the Tiger Woods thing.

*James:* Okay. The only thing, again, though, I would question is that I don't think there's really anybody saying Tiger Woods shouldn't be allowed to play golf, so I don't know if that's controversial enough to talk about.

*Max:* Well, that's like – I guess like what I talk about there is like how he's – I don't know. Okay, 'cause that goes back to what I have, 'cause I'd like say how he's changing it so like it is accepted for minorities to play.

It is clear that Max was not invested in the revision strategy James proposed and that James did not really have interest in Max's original line of reasoning. Both James and Max appeared unconvinced that the other's plan for the paper would be successful. But as the session continues,

James and Max discussed many interesting topics related to the question of women and professional golf: should women be allowed at Augusta? Should women be allowed to play in PGA Tour events? What influence do media controversies have on the sport itself? Why is Michelle Wie such a role model to young women? Would she be such a role model if she weren't trying to break stereotypes by playing in men's tour events? Throughout the conference, James asked Max really difficult questions and Max grappled with them. In many ways, this was an ideal conference. In "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" Kenneth Bruffee argues that "peer tutoring provides a social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation that academics most value" (91). I would argue that James engaged Max in precisely the kind of academic debate and inquiry that helps both student and tutor grow as thinkers; it is a conversation that is "emotionally involved, intellectually and substantively focused" (Bruffee 91).

*James:* I wonder – I mean here you're talking about, you know, like women being the equal of men in golf. Do you believe that or is that –

*Max:* Yeah, they should be equal but not play on the same tour 'cause I guess, to me, that's like a – in my head, that's like a different issue.

*James:* But can they play as well as men can?

*Max:* Some of them can but like the thing is, like, if they play on the men's tour, why don't men play on the women's tour? 'Cause like that's like the thing it keeps going back to for me 'cause then that wouldn't be fair to the better women.

'Cause like the 100th guy on the PGA tour could win all the LPGA tour events and that wouldn't be fair to the best women and then it's not fair to like the men who are like in that 100th position if the best woman is like on a PGA tour competing with them then.

*James:* Okay, so you're saying –

*Max:* It's like it goes both ways. It's unfair to women and it's unfair to men in a way.

*James:* Okay, so sort of – yeah, for that like middle of the pack, you know, male golfer –

*Max:* Yeah, it's like the middle –

*James:* If the top women golfers are being allowed in, he's getting knocked off the men's list but he then can't go to the women's list. [...] Okay. I think I mean one thing – I guess in some ways I think you're making a case that men's golf and women's golf are like separate sports in some ways and that like you can't compare the two.

*Max:* Yeah, just like women soccer players don't play on men's national teams and stuff. It's like as like the professional sports go they're separate entities and they shouldn't – it's just like any other two professional sports.

In this rather fruitful exchange of ideas, Max actually made an argument – somebody might not agree that men's golf and women's golf are inherently separate sports – that James thought had potential. Nevertheless, Max continued to resist the changes they discussed. He told James, "I'm still not sure about the whole topic."

But even as Max became more discouraged, James became more encouraging about the new direction they discussed.

*James:* Another good thing to do is maybe we can sort of anticipate what the counter arguments would be and then you can answer them.

*Max:* Okay.

*James:* Do you know what I mean?

*Max:* Yeah.

*James:* So, you know, if I were to say that [...] the winner of the PGA tour is considered the best golfer in the world. It's not fair that a woman doesn't have the chance to be the best golfer in the world. How would you answer that?

*Max:* Well, it's the best male golfer and the best female golfer in the world. Like they're still – like they're separate things so they're not – okay. I see

what you're saying there. [...] Like you have two – like they're – I mean that goes back like they're separate tours, so you have the separate best player in the world. [...] Yeah, 'cause like in tennis you have the best female player in the world, the best [male player] –

Some would argue that James took over Max's paper and was forcing new ideas on to him. I think there is some truth to that criticism. On the other hand, James truly thought that Max's paper missed the mark, that it did not do what the assignment asked him to do. Given that problem, James wanted to help Max find a way to write a more argumentative paper and, to a lesser extent, to fill six pages. In this portion of the session, James began to articulate the positions that Max's opposition might take in order to help Max generate more topics about which to write.

*James:* We could talk about [...] Wie; like she's become such a like marketing phenomenon. She's got all these people looking up to her and part of that is because she's gone on to play on the men's tour.

*Max:* Yeah.

*James:* What would you say to that?

*Max:* Like what – I guess it depends like what positives. I know like it puts you in a hard position to be asked a question, but like –

*James:* Well, I mean [...] one place to start with is that, you know, you might be able to argue that she's become a role model to all kinds of girls by taking on like patriarchal society.

*Max:* Yeah, like I would be – like I think that's good and I like – I think that's good inspiration stuff and then that's like 100 percent against my argument, though. [...]

*James:* So what is an answer to that?

*Max:* What was the question again?

*James:* You know, like Michelle Wie's become such a great role model for young girls, that she's doing, you know, all this kinda great stuff through that. How would you answer that by saying she shouldn't be on the PGA tour?

- Max:* I don't know. I just don't see like what the – because like, yeah, I think those are good but then that goes against my argument that women shouldn't be playing on the men's tour. [...]
- James:* You could give that sort of like measured argument like, you know, “well, it's true that she is providing blah, blah, blah as a role model. This isn't to say blah, blah, blah.”
- But I also think [...] – I mean you could talk about, you know, maybe, you know, women shouldn't have to prove themselves like as a man to be successful and so then like –
- Max:* Yeah.
- James:* You know like by framing it that a successful woman is one who can pass as a man...that's not [...] a healthy female role model. [...] Maybe you talk about [how] Wie never did very well when she actually played, did she? Is that true?
- Max:* Yeah.
- James:* [...] You could talk, maybe say something about how she's turning into this like media circus and taking away from like the purity of the game or something like that.
- Max:* Yeah.
- James:* You know, it's – golf isn't about golf anymore. It's about gender issues and stuff.
- Max:* Yeah.

In this part of the conference, James showed Max how all that they had discussed could be shaped into a paper. He generated several “counter-arguments” and showed Max how even ideas that contradict what he actually thinks could be worked in to ultimately strengthen his own position. Because James seemed to disagree with Max's arguments about women and golf, he could raise a number of thoughtful objections to Max's line of reasoning and helped him generate justifications for his positions. James offered Max two important ideas that Max could use to support his point: women have not done well when they have played on the men's tour,



and it is not healthy to think that the only way a woman can be successful in sports is to “pass as a man.” This last argument, especially, may resonate with some of the more outspoken proponents of women infiltrating the men’s game.

Still, Max resisted overhauling his paper. This was probably because, as the transcript clearly reveals, he felt no investment in what they discussed. On the draft he took to the writing center and gave to me later, Max wrote, “didn’t use any of advice.” And indeed, the final draft follows almost the same pattern that the draft did:

*Part One:* Description of John, a well-dressed, high-tipping man who goes to the exclusive golf club on Saturday morning followed by an introduction to the stereotypes we hold of golfers and the claim that “it is indisputable that golf has a stereotype, but over the past decade its image has been improving.” 2 paragraphs.

*Part Two:* Discussion of factors that influence our stereotypes: history of the game, the PGA itself, personal experience with golfers. Max adds a new paragraph about his personal experience of golfing with his grandfather. 2 paragraphs.

*Part Three:* First stereotype undergoing change: women golfers. Creation of LPGA, superstar Annika Sorenstam, phenom Michelle Wie, rising popularity of golf among women. 2 paragraphs.

*Part Four:* Second stereotype: Race and Tiger Woods’ influence on game. 1 paragraph.

*Part Five:* Third stereotype: Who is playing game – age and socioeconomic class?  
Introduction of programs like “First Tee.”<sup>29</sup> 1 paragraph.

*Conclusion:* “Golf needs to be a game in which everyone regardless of sex, ethnicity, and beliefs are equally accepted.” 1 paragraph.

To be frank, it is disappointing to read the final version of Max’s paper. Although the new opening description is vivid and interesting, and his title – “Knickers and Cigars: A Stereotype” – sets up a thought-provoking beginning, there are few substantive changes to this paper. Although Max had not drafted the last two sections of the paper prior to his writing center conference, little in them stems from what was a very thoughtful session.

One sentence that may be traced to the conference is a connection Max draws between Sorenstam and Woods midway through his paper: “Tiger’s influence on the game’s stereotype is very similar to that of Annika Sorenstam, in that they are both the most popular players on their respective tours, but Woods is changing the game for African Americans and minorities, while Sorenstam is revolutionizing it for women.” Here he does draw on the idea he stated during the session that there is a top women’s player and a top men’s player. Aside from this statement which may have a root in the session, it is hard to find other traces of the writing center session.

So what distinguishes these two sessions, one between James and Michelle and one between James and Max? In both sessions, James makes an initial recommendation that sets the agenda for the session. With Michelle, he focuses on the organization and logic of the body paragraphs: how does humor function in each of the examples you have given? With Max, he

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<sup>29</sup> In his paper, Max reports that “The First Tee program was initiated by the World Golf Federation and is backed by the USGA and PGA of America.” And while this is true – according to First Tee’s website (“History of The First Tee”) – it is also true that The First Tee is a pork barrel project of Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina who earmarked \$3 million for the program in 2007 (“Pig Book”). I’m not sure if Max was aware of this fact, but it would have been interesting to see him grapple with the use of tax dollars to fund what is arguably nothing more than a hobby. This would have been especially interesting because in another paper, Max argued that progressive taxing amounts to theft.

focuses on the argument (or lack of argument): given these stereotypes about golfers, what argument can you make? But only one writer – Michelle – makes revisions to her paper based on the tutorial. In her session, Michelle actually generated the three roles she thought humor played in the stories she interpreted. On the other hand, Max consistently registered concerns about whether he would be able to compose a paper about the more narrow topics James suggested. Max was less involved with the concept generation in this tutorial; once James suggested arguments surrounding “women and golf,” he and Max generated a number of relevant and interesting points, enough, I would imagine, to fill six pages. But Max makes few revisions to his paper after the session, instead expanding the outline he came with.

There are two notable differences between these sessions. The first difference is that James has no specific knowledge of Michelle’s topic: he had not read Alexie’s narrative. But as his questions reveal, James does know something about the recent controversies surrounding the PGA and LPGA tours. His position as an outsider in relation to Michelle’s paper caused him to take a fairly non-directive approach, one marked by open-ended questions that allowed Michelle the time to “figure out what [she’s] thinking here.” Michelle generated the new ideas that shape her revised paper. But when James works with Max, something different happens. Although James began with an open-ended question – “What are you arguing in this paper?” – Max’s answer doesn’t really matter because James seemed to have decided what “the most ideal” paper would look like. James then spent much of the rest of the conference attempting to persuade Max to his way of thinking. James’s knowledge of the major controversies in golf lead him, I think, to miss Max’s rather obvious resistance to the ideas they’re discussing.

The second difference is the level of investment each student had in the suggestions generated during the session. Even though both students said “Yeah” when James asked them if

they agreed with his assessment of their papers, only one of them really meant it. Michelle generated ideas for her paper with James as a guide; Max generated ideas in response to questions James asked, but he felt no real investment in those questions.

There are many signs that Max was unengaged as this session progressed: his repeated worry about page length (as opposed to substance); his comment that he was “not sure about the whole topic”; the one word replies (e.g. “yeah”...“yeah”...“yeah”) that mark his contributions toward the session’s end. But Max wasn’t unengaged from the outset: he chose to visit the writing center because he doubted whether he was on the right track. One implication of this tutorial is that tutor training ought to include some emphasis on verbal and nonverbal signs of student engagement. Why does James persist on the “women in golf” angle when Max’s words resist this? I may agree that “golf is changing” was not a strong argument, but James could have registered that concern and still agreed to work with it if that was what Max wanted. Writing tutors must remember that their role is to engage writers in conversation – which James does – but they also need to allow *writers* to choose where the discussion leads. James shows little interest in what Max wanted to say and it is therefore hardly a surprise that the paper’s revision followed the draft’s basic outline.

## **4.2 DEADLINE LOOMING**

Another factor that affected the degree of revision in Max’s assignment was surely the deadline. Max and James met on Sunday, October 8; his paper was due the next morning. Max’s resistance to dramatic change probably stemmed from the deadline under which he was working. Obviously the more time students allow between a writing center conference and the due date,

the more time they can invest in a paper's revision. But some students plan far enough ahead to meet with tutors about their paper not once, but twice or even three times before the paper deadline. In such cases, students can approach revision as a recursive process with "different levels of attention and different agenda for each cycle" (Sommers 386).

Like Kiki who visited the writing center frequently throughout the semester, Isabella used the tutorial services provided for every paper she wrote for Schmidt's class, sometimes scheduling multiple appointments for each paper. Isabella came to DePauw from the city of Chicago where she lived during the last three years of high school. Prior to moving to Chicago, Isabella lived in the Western United States, but she was born in the Philippines and moved to the US at age eleven. Although Isabella began to learn English when she entered school in the Philippines and says she was surrounded by English her entire life, Isabella's first language is the dialect Bisaya. Of learning English, Isabella said, "It took me quite some time to learn – but I like to observe people and the way they talk." Her spoken English is fluent and fluid; if she hadn't told me English wasn't her first language, I would have assumed it was.

Isabella attended a public high school in Chicago where education is often criticized for being forgettable, at best. Public opinion resonates with Isabella's experience. "I wrote in high school," she told me, "but I can't recall if it was hard or challenging. I didn't write a lot." However, Isabella took AP English, a course that did concentrate on writing. Although some of the writing for this course was personal, much of it required students to respond to texts they had read. Isabella recalled reading Erik Larson's popular non-fiction narrative *Devil in the White City* and articles from the *Economist* and other magazines. During class time, Isabella remembered her teacher would "talk about grammar." More specifically, she would "emphasize how to use semi-colons and also cover thesis and organization."

Isabella chose DePauw originally because she heard about its involvement with the Posse Program.<sup>30</sup> She did not ultimately become a member of the Posse class, but “DePauw gave me a lot of money so I came here.” In addition to the financial aspect of her decision, Isabella was impressed by small classes “as opposed to a classroom where a professor gives a lecture for a hundred kids.” And, she added, “I wanted to challenge myself.”

Though excited about the possibilities in her future, Isabella was realistic. “I want to become a veterinarian but I’m really weak at science,” she said. Then she sighed, “I like math but it doesn’t like me. English is probably my best subject.” To that end, Isabella chose a first-year seminar titled “Why We Read Poetry.” Only a few weeks into the semester, Isabella said, “that one is, like, really rough.” The seminar’s course description reveals why Isabella felt intimidated by it:

Readings for our seminar will introduce some of the most celebrated poets in Western civilization (those not in English will be read in translation). We will also focus on these poets' own theoretical writings that deal with the process of poetic creativity. Class discussions will explore the power as well as the limits of the word and its relation to the representation of reality. As we read Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Yeats, Lorca, Frost, and others, we will question the modes of perception that have defined modernity, and we will consider the paradoxes that have shaped major intellectual movements over the past 200 years.

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<sup>30</sup> Each year, the Posse Foundation recruits promising students from inter-city public high schools. These students form multicultural groups known as “posses” during their senior years and go through a “pre-college training” which makes them eligible for enrollment in thirty top tier colleges including Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Oberlin, Rice, and DePauw (“What is Posse?”). Universities that partner with the Posse Foundation grant Posse students full-tuition, four-year scholarships. DePauw has enrolled Posse Scholars since 1996 and was the first university to enroll Posses from both Chicago and New York yearly (“Robert G. Bottoms, DePauw’s President Since 1986, Announces Retirement Plans”).

I did not ask Isabella why she felt this seminar would pose such a challenge to her. However, the language of the description alone – phrases such as “the modes of perception that have defined modernity” and “the paradoxes that have shaped major intellectual movements” – suggests that the course could pose a significant challenge to even the most well-prepared first-year students. By her own admission, Isabella was not among the most well-prepared students at DePauw. She rattled off a whole list of writing weaknesses: “I tend to be wordy. Sometimes I’m not organized at all. Thesis-wise: very difficult to get a thesis. [...] I have a lot of different problems. Sometimes I lack support for whatever I’m saying.”

I asked Isabella, “Does awareness that you’re wordy, for example, help you revise?” Isabella replied, “I didn’t actually notice it. My English teacher (in high school) had to point it out and I was like, ‘You know, you’re right!’” Later in the interview, Isabella admitted that she sometimes “BS’s” in her writing. Together, these statements suggest that while Isabella had a sense of what her teacher/audience expected of her writing – that it “sound” professional, that it is concisely worded, well-organized, and driven by a thesis – she lacked a set of strategies to meet those expectations.

Isabella’s first semester at DePauw did, in fact, challenge her. Schmidt asked her to meet for a one-on-one conference after Isabella submitted her first assignment; they used the time to work on sentence-level concerns that non-native speakers typically face. Nonetheless, during the first semester, Schmidt was Isabella’s favorite professor, College Writing II her favorite class. Writing did not come easily for Isabella, but she worked hard, seeking help in the writing center and from her professor. Although grades are subjective, imperfect measures of a student’s achievement, Isabella’s final paper earned an A-, a real testament to not only her development as a writer, but her ability to take a complicated idea and make it lucid in her writing. In May 2007,

Isabella was also one of thirteen students awarded the “Biggs-Steele College Writing Award.” This award, named for two long-time instructors of College Writing at DePauw, is given to students to recognize either “greatest achievement” or “greatest improvement” in writing during College Writing II.

Isabella’s first assignment for Schmidt’s class was due on Wednesday, September 13. Schmidt required students bring drafts to class on September 6 and they participated in a peer response activity during class time. Isabella’s first appointment in the writing center was later that evening. Isabella chose the same topic as Rachel did:<sup>31</sup>

In her personal essay “What Did You Expect?” (Convergences 71), Dorothy Allison rejects being represented as a cliché. Write an essay in which you discuss Allison’s representation of herself in “What Did You Expect.”

Recall that Allison’s essay deals with the expectations she thinks others have of her as a writer and that the essay is prompted by her rejection of the fantastic representations a photographer suggested.

The draft of Isabella’s paper has significant problems. The opening paragraphs of her paper reveal a number of them:

Expectations of how a woman should present herself can vary from the minute detail to how she drinks her tea or to the most obvious as how she dresses. Frankly, women feel most liberated today compared from the earlier years, yet one may struggle to find a path of one’s own for a general standard has been set, set that so it remains to be maintained until a mutation occurs.

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<sup>31</sup> Schmidt also instructed: “Your paper should have an introduction in which you anchor the thesis or central proposition (more on this in class); body paragraphs, with topic sentences, that support and develop (rather than simply repeat) your thesis [...]; and a conclusion that ends on a thoughtful, perhaps surprising note.”



In Dorothy Allison's "What Did You Expect," she insists on rejecting the pattern of how women should be or feel they should be. In the reading, assumptions about Allison's lifestyle were recognized by the public – almost using it in judging her overall being. Expectations about Allison's appearance and background had been a subject as well; a subject that she later further defends when rejecting the request of the photographer. Acknowledging the fact that the majority, especially women, have grown to internalize the standards of particular expectations most likely set by society. This is probably her motivation and her chosen weapon in charging to battle and rebel herself against what society expects.

In the first paragraph, Isabella attempts to enter the conversation by suggesting some specific examples of clichés about women: the way they drink, the way they dress. In the second sentence, she makes a claim – that “women feel most liberated today compared from the earlier years” – and adds a useful complication, that they “may struggle to find a path of one's own.” The rest of this sentence exhibits the “wordiness” – “it remains to be maintained” – that Isabella said her writing would. Moreover, the word “mutation” seems strange here, perhaps suggesting that Isabella thought saying “until a *change* occurs” would be too immature. I suspect she used WORD's thesaurus as she drafted this sentence.

In the second paragraph, Isabella moves from the general to the specific: here she introduces the essay about which she is writing and suggests that Allison herself felt the public judge her and her lifestyle. When it comes to the thesis statement, Isabella's is hard to find. Based on the final two sentences in the second paragraph, it seems Isabella wants to argue something like “The standards that Allison feels the public places on her as a woman, a

Southerner, and a writer motivate her to rebel against what that same public expects using \_\_\_\_\_ as her weapon.” The writing center session reveals that Isabella has a different argument in mind.

Isabella’s tutor for her first session about this paper was Jenna, a junior who had just begun to tutor. Jenna was also Isabella’s new student mentor so they had already met and began the session by talking a bit about mentor related activities. When they moved to the paper, Jenna asked Isabella to assess her paper; “What needs work?”

*Isabella:* My thesis is definitely lack – or missing and when I was like writing this, I was just writing it in general as a draft really. I wasn’t like really – ’cause I know she wanted us to revise and revise and revise and revise.

But I know like my weakness is my thesis. I mean I’m pretty good at like kind of like, you know – I think conclusion and introduction. [...] But like conclusion is okay. I think I could handle conclusion, like sometimes I get lost with like the paragraphs, the bodies of paragraphs.

*Jenna:* Like in knowing where to separate them or knowing how to –?

*Isabella:* Organize them.

*Jenna:* Organize them. Okay.

*Isabella:* ’Cause sometimes I get really wordy and I think you might be able to see it there.

*Jenna:* Okay.

*Isabella:* And I know that I sometimes don’t give enough examples to back up the sentence before.

This excerpt suggests that Isabella lacked confidence as a writer. She seemed comfortable with only her conclusion. But even as she said that, she quickly moved to further weakness.

After Jenna read Isabella’s paper, she agreed with Isabella: “I think that you’re right, that your thesis statement – well, two things.” Jenna pointed to Isabella’s opening paragraph where

one typically finds a thesis statement and analyzes, “We have this introduction that is one introductory sentence and then a really long thesis statement.” But Isabella felt differently:

*Isabella:* Actually, when I was – I don’t even think that’s my thesis statement and I know that they said that you don’t really – you can’t really figure out your thesis statement until the very end [...].

*Jenna:* It can be really hard, I think, because – I mean you’re right. It takes sometimes a lot of thinking and a lot of development to really figure out what you’re trying to say. [...]

Okay, so what do you think – and just kind of like in your own words – what is her representation of herself?

One of the more important aspects of this exchange was the question Jenna asked of Isabella. “What do you think,” Jenna asked, “is Allison’s representation of herself?” Because Jenna had not read Allison’s essay, she cannot help Isabella answer this question. But by asking the open-ended question, Jenna brought Allison’s text into the writing center session and showed Isabella that working on writing involves thinking about the material with which she must engage as well as the writing she has already produced.

Jenna’s question about Allison’s essay also illustrated a point I began to make in Chapter 2, namely that there are differences among responders. Classroom peers, I observed, tend to offer direction (e.g. “elaborate,” “tighten thesis”) and peer tutors tend to ask more questions to illicit students’ musings. Another difference is that peer tutors seem more able than classroom peers to imagine what the paper might become. In this case, Jenna’s question prompted Isabella to begin to interpret what Allison’s description of her own actions reflect about Allison’s representation of herself.

*Isabella:* I do think she is a strong person. Like she wants to like to be this woman, an independent woman different from a regular type of woman.

But then again when I was reading [...] I thought of it, like, yeah, she's showing this kind of strong persona but then again I can tell like there's – you have a little weakness in you, but you're trying to show your strongest side to everybody, so that's how I feel.

*Jenna:* And I think that's the really interesting part of this paper to me because [...] I like this kind of argument that you have that, yeah, she may be going against the grain, but is that covering up some sort of weakness that she has or some sort of fear that she has or something like that?

And so I like that and that's a unique argument that you make and so I think that's a really good idea to try to put that into your thesis statement.

Isabella articulated that Allison wants to be a strong, independent woman yet feels “weakness inside her” in the body of her paper. She writes, “On the other hand, as much as Allison bestows upon [us] her opinion on being the sort of woman she wants to be, ironically she is sometimes defeated. An example of this, her weakness, is when she gets practices her own style of covering up her smile from the world when she sensed uncomfot or fear.” This sentence most closely resembles what Isabella thinks her argument really is. Jenna encourages Isabella to work on “paring down” this idea into a succinct sentence that could serve as her thesis, but Isabella hesitates, “I don't have to think about it now. Right?” Knowing that there was plenty more to work on, Jenna said they would come back to it.

In addition to the thesis statement, Jenna identified Isabella's quotation usage and analysis as problem areas. Isabella's third paragraph began

“...My mama's replica” (74) is Alison admitting to having some physical facial similarities with her mother. Yet she is aware “where the difference lies” (74) and that is seen by her not too enthused by wearing makeup growing up even with the presence of older sisters to face the world any day.

Although the sentence structure here is awkward, Isabella nicely chooses portions of quotes to include. Oftentimes students struggle to choose only the portions of quotes that are relevant to

their discussion; Isabella knows to identify smaller pieces with which to work. On the other hand, Jenna told Isabella “you use quotes and you assume that everyone has read this and knows what you’re talking about. So when you use quotes, you might want to explain it a little bit more.” Speaking specifically of the quote that begins the paragraph above, Jenna said,

When you set up quotes, it’s difficult to know how to situate them in the rest of your prose. But here you need a little more explanation because to start a paragraph with a quote is jolting – it’s like wait, what? Who said that? When you use a quote, explain who it’s coming from before hand and then afterwards say what it means to you: “it’s important because...”

Jenna and Isabella reworked this paragraph with Jenna modeling to Isabella more effective ways of integrating and interpreting the quote.

Overall, Isabella and Jenna spent considerable time on two issues: thesis and quote usage. Because this session took place a week before the paper was due, it seemed likely that Isabella would be able to rework these significant portions before its due date. Before leaving the writing center, Isabella vowed, “Right now I’ll work with what we’ve got and I’ll come back for another appointment.”

And she did. Isabella’s second appointment was five days later, on September 11, two nights before the paper was due. In the intervening days, Isabella made significant changes to her paper. For example, many of Isabella’s quotes were better integrated:

Having some physical facial similarities with her mother is Allison admitting she is her “...mama’s replica...” (74). Yet she is aware “...where the difference lies” (74) and that is seen by her not too enthused to wearing make-up even while growing up with the presence of older sisters who learned to face the

world any day in the same fashion as their mother's. Refusing to put [on] such a mask is what makes of Allison's point –to not “be anything like what was expected” (76) of her.

This paragraph is by no means elegant or even efficient, but Isabella did a better job of introducing and integrating the quotes she has used. The interpretation, too, is better, though there is still considerable room for improvement. As someone who has read Allison's essay, I know that refusing to wear make-up – she calls it “war paint” (76) and a “mask” – is a big deal for Allison, a true sign that she refuses to act like her mother and sisters. But Isabella's language does not convey how significant the make-up example is to Allison's representation of herself.

Isabella also reworked her introduction and attempted to rewrite her thesis so that it reflects the points she makes in her paper. She begins,

Expectations of how a woman should present herself can vary from the minute detail of how she drinks her tea or to the most obvious as how she dresses. Frankly, women feel most liberated today compared from the earlier years, yet one may struggle to find a path of one's own for a general standard has been set, set that so it remains to be maintained until a mutation occurs. This paper will contain how Allison, a southern writer, reveal and demands herself a different kind of woman, her refusal to be like the other women, what she can offer society and at the same time seeing the unfolding of her internal concern that she is conflicting with alone.

The first sentence of Isabella's paper remains the same (though a few typos have been corrected) but she writes a new thesis statement for the paper. It is inelegant in its current state, but the new thesis statement – which posits that while Allison asserts herself as a “different kind of woman,”

she deals with an internal conflict – makes a claim (unlike its predecessor). Isabella does not go so far as to say that there is “weakness” under Allison’s exterior, a claim she made during the writing center session with Jenna. As her second tutor, Matthew, pointed out, there are obvious problems with her thesis statement: it is long, it is hard to understand, and it is unclear what the claim is upon first reading. Moreover, the second argument – that beneath the “different woman” is one who is insecure – is lost because the statement lacks a strong transitional word or phrase. Isabella seems to be saying something like “Allison, a southern writer, reveals herself to be a different kind of woman, one who refuses to be like other women. However, this essay also reveals the internal concerns and weaknesses she battles alone.”

In her second writing center session with Matthew, a sophomore tutoring for the first semester, the thesis was again the focus.

*Matthew:* The thesis is a bit long – your point is clear, but just, when trying to read this out loud... “This paper will contain how Allison, a southern writer, reveals and demands herself a different kind of woman, her refusal to be like the other women, what she can offer society and at the same time seeing the unfolding of her internal concern that she is conflicting with alone.”

*Isabella:* I think this is a bit odd ...“This paper will contain....” I was trying to find a way to introduce Allison.

*Matthew:* I think you could avoid “this paper will contain.” Perhaps you could introduce Allison in one sentence and then your thesis is that she’s refusing to conform. I think the basic idea that I got throughout the whole paper is that she doesn’t want to conform to be like other women who have. I might boil this down and just say that. It’s a bit wordy.

Interestingly, Isabella questioned her own word usage and asked Matthew to advise her on wording that she finds “odd.” Despite the length of the thesis statement and some awkward phrasing, Matthew recognized the point Isabella wished to make, that “she doesn’t want to conform to be like other women have.” He seemed to miss, however, that Isabella also wanted to

argue that Allison falters – or otherwise seems weak – over her decision to reject others’ expectations of her. Nearly forty minutes into the session, when the two discuss the conclusion, Matthew actually questioned Isabella’s assertion that

[Allison] tried to represent herself as a woman who is need to be taken seriously but at the same time she is delicate in the core, as many probably can relate to. I believe she felt obligated to act, look, and feel the way she did because society may have given her the impression that there is only one kind of woman and that is one who wears make-up. Her frankness and intent are obvious but her weakness though hardly translated for the readers in “What Did You Expect?” can be seen uncovering slowly for us to understand.

This concluding paragraph was unchanged from the draft Isabella worked on with Jenna. It was from here that Isabella developed what she told Jenna she wanted to argue: “I think she really wants to be strong, not a regular type of woman. But at the same time, I can tell there’s weakness inside her.” When Matthew read this in the conclusion and suggested that it did not align with the rest of her argument, Isabella seemed concerned.

*Matthew:* Do you think that’s the main point or is this idea that she’s striving to be an independent person and not like the women before her who have conformed?

*Isabella:* Well, like I think those two things. Like she wants to be a strong woman but she can’t show to the people how she really feels inside and I thought my thesis was supporting that, but –

*Matthew:* I think your thesis, the way I’m reading it at least, the main point of the thesis is that she’s working to gain her independence, to be a strong woman.

*Isabella:* Right.

*Matthew:* And that –



*Isabella:* And that eventual – I don't know. This – the whole unfolding of her internal problem is just like my point that I see as I was reading it, that she may actually be hiding something inside.

Although Isabella had already revised her thesis statement, this conversation reveals that she still had not articulated in the introduction precisely what she intended to convey. I suspect that when Isabella initially drafted her paper, she added the idea that Allison has a weak interior beneath her independent exterior to the conclusion both because this line of reasoning developed as she wrote her paper and also because Schmidt encouraged students to end on “a thoughtful, perhaps surprising note.” Schmidt clearly hoped to teach students to do something other than summarize their papers in their conclusions. However, students interpreted the advice to end on a “surprising” note as advice to add something new to the conclusion which goes against the conventional wisdom; many tutors questioned the inclusion of the “new information” Schmidt's students added in their conclusions. In this case, Matthew's concerns were justified; after all, Isabella told Jenna that she wanted to argue that Allison is simultaneously strong and weak. This idea was presented in her conclusion, but not strongly worded in her thesis statement.

After her conference with Jenna, Isabella was able to write a thesis statement, to add it to the introduction. After meeting with Matthew, her agenda will be to craft a thesis statement that clearly articulates the disparity she senses between Allison's exterior personality and her interior insecurity. Isabella even recognized that her thesis statement would need to be revised; she is learning what Sommers claims “experienced writers” know, that the revision process is “a process with significant recurring activities” (386). Because Isabella is a novice writer, she will spend significant time revising in order to discover and articulate what she thinks.

In the draft that Isabella turned in to Prof. Schmidt, she again revised her thesis statement.

9/11/06 Draft

This paper will contain how Allison, a southern writer, reveal and demands herself a different kind of woman, her refusal to be like the other women, what she can offer society and at the same time seeing the unfolding of her internal concern that she is conflicting with alone.

9/13/06 Final Draft

Dorothy Allison, a prominent southern writer, reveals and demands to be a different kind of woman by refusing to conform to the norms of society. She refuses to be like other women, encourages the importance of individuality, and yet without being aware of it, unfolds an internal struggle that she combats with alone.

The changes that Isabella made significantly increase the readability of this section. By breaking one long, multi-claused sentence into two sentences, Isabella first introduces the writer and her subject and then asserts her argument about the essay. There are still problems with this sentence. The verb “demands” is strange: what does it mean that “Allison demands to be a different kind of woman”? The verb “unfolds” doesn’t quite work either. Still, with the help of her tutors, Isabella has made significant strides toward crafting an interesting, clear thesis statement. Her tutors primarily help her assert an argument and develop her body paragraphs around it; because the work on these parts occupied Isabella’s effort, she did not have time to revise for sentence-level clarity on this paper.

Thus, when Isabella received her paper back from Schmidt, it was marked with changes to grammar and syntax. On the second page, Schmidt wrote, “Isabella: your sentence structure needs work. But rather than editing your sentences, I would like to read them with you when we meet.” There are few marginal comments about content. Next to one paragraph, Schmidt wrote, “vague: the point of this paragraph is unclear.” In the end comment, Schmidt wrote, “let’s meet

to discuss your paper. Your expression and ideas want more clarity. There are some good points in this paper, but they are inhibited by flawed diction and ungrammatical sentences. I'd be happy to go over the paper with you.”

To receive this paper back might be frustrating given how much time Isabella invested in revising it. To see correction upon correction – especially when this wasn't the focus of her work with tutors – probably felt deflating. On the other hand, Isabella had a fairly realistic sense of her strengths and weaknesses as a writer. She allowed herself a week to revise her paper and, in that time, reframed it not once, but twice. She also worked to clarify her ideas as related to the quotations she chose. She could make these changes because she allowed ample time for revision, and because she sought input from writing center tutors.

Meeting with multiple tutors has limitations, too. Jenna and Matthew had different tutoring styles and prioritized different writing concerns and because Matthew began working through the paper line by line without asking Isabella to clarify her argument at the beginning, the second session was fairly inefficient. Nevertheless, visiting the writing center more than once allowed Isabella to experience revision as a process. She learned from the experience of revising her first essay that revision is on-going and that just because a thesis statement, for example, is revised once doesn't mean I can't benefit from further revision.

#### **4.2.1 Whatever you say: when a Tutor has too much authority**

Students who use the writing center regularly often seek out a tutor with whom they feel confident working. Kiki – who used the writing center the most of all the students in the study – worked with Joshua, a junior, on several occasions, particularly in the middle of the semester. He

worked with her on the second portion of her portfolio assignment. The opening paragraph of the second portfolio assignment captures its subject and Kiki's argument. It begins,

Though women are woman no matter where they are from, the cultural differences or the expectations of society influence the women to adapt different passions and satisfactions. Even though Japanese society claims that all men and women have equal rights, I realize how Japanese woman's rights are limited as I look at American women freely expressing themselves both in society and private life. American women are more capable and accepted to express their equal rights.

Recall that in her first portfolio assignment, Kiki wrote a description of her mother and that it revealed what she saw as her mother's strength and beauty. The second paper holds the promise that Kiki will show that women in both cultures find ways to feel satisfied even though the things that bring satisfaction to women in each place differs. She concludes the opening paragraph with this assertion: "A Japanese woman's passion is to serve her husband as a wife and take care of her children as a mother; whereas, an American woman finds her passion with being a mother and also a more independent woman at the same time." She illustrates this point in the body of her paper by analyzing the roles women in Japan and women in America play in two holidays: a festival for Shinto gods and Thanksgiving. She reveals a number of interesting facts including that she has never heard her parents say "I love you" to one another (nor has she ever seen them kiss), that the concept of "baby-sitting" is unfamiliar in rural Japan (where customs remain more traditional), and that the division of household labor – childcare, cooking, doing dishes – is more blurred in the US households she has observed than it is in Japan.

Joshua worked with Kiki to proof-read and edit a late draft of that paper (she had worked with two other tutors to brainstorm and revise it) and was thus familiar with the overall project when Kiki came with her third portion in which she was asked to

explore your subject creatively, enhancing your reader's understanding through characterization and storytelling. You may create an imaginary situation or use the narrative techniques practiced in class to portray actual people and events associated with your subject. In either case, you should conceive this narrative as a compliment to your critical work in part 2, since the final stage of your portfolio will require you to synthesize your critical and creative writing.

In this paper, Kiki contrasts a Japanese mother making supper and breakfast for her family with an American woman making supper and lunch for her family. The paper has four distinct parts.

They begin:

- “A Japanese mother stands in the kitchen thinking about the menu for a supper.”
- “An American mother stands in the kitchen thinking about the menu for a supper.”
- “The Japanese mother standing in the kitchen to make lunch boxes for her children.”
- “An American mother stands in the kitchen to put lunches together for her children.”

In the four parts – perhaps most accurately called vignettes – Kiki creates two characters who are meant to depict real women living in Japan and America.

The distinction between “wife” and “woman” is particularly clear in this piece. The Japanese husband calls his wife to say “that he will be home around 11:00pm. She shows appreciation for his hard work and asks him to come home safely.” Sometime after midnight, this woman receives a text message that says he has “decided to stay at a hotel tonight.” There is a dark undertone here. Is the husband cheating on his wife? Is he merely working so hard that he

misses dinner and the whole evening with his family? Does he work far from home so that returning so late would be dangerous? Does he rely on public transportation that, at this late hour, no longer runs? It is hard to know for sure, but the husband figure does not appear in the two vignettes about the Japanese household. As wife and mother, it is this woman's duty to prepare meals for her children and for her husband whether or not he will be home to eat them.

The American mother, on the other hand, not only prepares a meal for her family, but prepares herself for her husband's arrival at home after work. At 6:30, husband and children come tumbling in (the husband has presumably picked up the children from their afternoon activities) and are greeted by their mother who has just spent time putting feminine touches on both herself and her home: "She lights the candles and dim the lights in the dining room. It is almost 6:20pm, they should be home pretty soon, she thinks it to herself and runs upstairs. She picks a nice silky, pink blouse that matches her earrings that her husband gave her for their seventeenth anniversary last year. She goes to the bathroom to check how she looks and smiles at the mirror." The implication here is clear: this woman, perhaps a stay-at-home mom, has time to devote to herself and she uses that time to make her home and herself attractive and romantic.

Her husband greets her with a breezy "Hi Honey" and a kiss. After her husband has cleared the dinner dishes, she settles down with him for a movie. They do not check on the children until after midnight, perhaps implying that the movie turns into a romantic evening of another kind. At any rate, in this story, the husband is not only present, but an involved, caring parent and husband. If being a "wife" implies to Kiki that one runs the household, then being a "woman" implies that one runs the household, but also maintains a sense of herself which includes feeling feminine, sexual, and like a distinct member of the family to which she belongs.

The writing center session transcript reveals that Kiki understood that neither woman is necessarily “typical”; she knew, in other words, that not all American women dress up for dinner and can spend leisurely evenings alone with their husbands “watching a movie together.”

*Joshua:* Are these sort of – are these based on like actual things you’ve observed or –?

*Kiki:* No, some made up.

*Joshua:* Well, I mean they’re made but I mean – ’cause I mean this is like, you know, a fairly sort of like idealistic vision of the family, you know, but I mean you stayed with [...] a nice Lutheran family where I mean maybe they were this, you know, happy together all the time.

It’s just that – you know, and I guess it can hold for these particular families. It’s just that, you know –

*Kiki:* It’s not typical.

*Joshua:* Right, it’s not necessarily typical. [...]

*Kiki:* True, yeah, but the point I want to make was how the mother in America can be woman, enjoy being woman and mother at the same time. Like – [...] Well, Japanese mothers enjoy, too, but like they’re more like devoted to be like a good mother.

Kiki did not mean to present her two families as “typical,” but wanted to use them to suggest some broadly stroked differences she had observed between women in each culture. Thus, it was clear that Kiki had observed some American women – presumably her host mother? – behave this way on occasion. Similarly, it is safe to assume that Kiki’s own mother sometimes behaved the way the Japanese mother does even if she doesn’t always behave this way. It is also important to remember Kiki’s goal for the overall portfolio project: she wanted to illustrate that traditional Japanese women play two predominant roles – wife and mother – while contemporary American women tend to play the roles of mother and woman.

While Kiki may have had a fairly naive sense of what a contemporary American family looks like – the woman in this scene is a modern day June Cleaver – there probably are some women in American who resemble this woman; she is not, as Joshua suggests, typical. But one aspect of her character – and of the Japanese mother’s character – may be more typical.

Kiki’s most vivid descriptions came in the way she describes the meals that each woman prepares for her family. The American mother, like most of us who cook at home, relies on convenience items ranging from frozen chicken, soup cubes, a crock pot, frozen peas, and French bread brought home from the store. She combines these with the fresh onions, celery, potatoes and garlic she has chopped. Perhaps this is even more homemade than most weeknight meals served in US homes. But the contrast to the meal made by the Japanese mother is striking. Not frozen, the chicken with which this woman works “form lines like an army linking up firmly for a next task.” She combines the chicken with herbs and cheese and then “starts dishing up salad.” The American mother throws all her colorful vegetables into a crock pot; they will no doubt come out with a grayish cast. But “Color is very important for Japanese dishes as well as how balanced the meals are in terms of nutrition.” Thus, the Japanese mother incorporates seaweed. Even as she cooks supper, the Japanese mother “thinks about the next day’s lunch” because “the lunch boxes she makes for her husband and children are her way of showing love and care.” To the chicken and salad, the mother adds yet another dish: *sashimi* and rice.

Early the next morning – at 5:30, Kiki says – the Japanese mother rises to prepare her children’s lunchboxes: “within thirty minutes she puts three pans and a pot with water on the stove to start cooking different dishes to go with rice.” For lunch, the children will eat rice balls with smiley faces made out of seaweed, *miso*, and asparagus wrapped with bacon. By contrast, the American mother rises only a few minutes before she wakes her family to make peanut butter



and jelly sandwiches. She adds “juice boxes and snack size bags of chips” to each brown bag, along with “granola bars” because she knows that her “children won’t be able to eat anything right after they get up.”

Kiki rendered these two portraits without judgment. I suspect that the entire portfolio project was one that Kiki undertook to try to understand who she will be as an adult. She was raised in a traditional Japanese family and probably imagined herself much like the Japanese woman in her story. But after coming to the US to study as a high school exchange student, she was confronted with another image of women. One is not better than the other. This American woman relies on the conveniences available so that she can enjoy an afternoon soap opera and an evening movie. She still makes her family a nutritious meal and packs lunches with care. She expresses her love for her children by hugging them and for her husband by dressing up for him and telling him “I love you.” This contrasts with the Japanese woman whose whole life, it seems, is devoted to her children and to her husband. She does not openly tell her husband or her children “I love you,” but the decorated lunch boxes convey her love for them.

Although Kiki did not explicitly state it, this essay reveals that the “convenience” items Americans can rely on are precisely those things that have allowed women to form identities as women apart from their identities as “wife” and “mother.” Again, it seems that Kiki wondered if it’s possible to be a “traditional Japanese woman” while living in America.

As a reader of this paper, I find both the topic and the presentation of ideas fascinating. Kiki does rely on a somewhat conservative portrait of American life. I do not think she means to indicate that these are “typical” families, but one limitation of her paper is that it does seem caricatured in some places. Joshua suggests naming the characters in the stories which may, in fact, help make the women seem less “representative” and, thus, more believable. Still, what she

has written fits the scope of this assignment and, while some grammatical errors persist, it is among the cleanest writing she has produced this semester.

Joshua did not admire the paper as I do. In addition to sensing that Kiki's sense of what is "typical" was skewed, Joshua also questioned how this portion of the assignment would fit into the larger portfolio assignment. The assignment prompt encouraged students to think about how this assignment would marry with the second portfolio assignment – "In either case, you should conceive this narrative as a compliment to your critical work in Part 2, since the final stage of your portfolio will require you to synthesize your critical and creative writing" – and Joshua focused on this aspect of the prompt. Therefore, he encouraged Kiki to go back to the holidays she described in Part 2 and to focus on the way that a woman in each situation would prepare a meal for her family: "That's why I thought about the holidays. A special situation might help you think more about specifics. That's what I was getting at with the names. If you assign a name, you might be more inclined to assign them an identity. That's what you're looking for." Kiki acted quiet and tired during this session, perhaps overwhelmed that Joshua thought it needed such an overhaul. Joshua talked a lot more on this night than he normally does.

*Joshua:* You seem a little out of it at the moment.

*Kiki:* I – hm. No, I have –

*Joshua:* Are you – you're thinking, "Oh, pooh. This is due tomorrow. I don't want to rewrite it" or –?

*Kiki:* No, no, no, no, no.

*Joshua:* No? [...]

*Kiki:* Yeah. It'll be all right.

*Joshua:* Of course, it'll be all right. Let's see. Because you show a really good sort of general instinct for detail. Like I like this little bit about the chickens lining up like an army and I think if you could just apply that

same sort of, you know, precision to the people themselves then it'll be good rather than just the things.

*Kiki:* Okay. Like do you think I need to – well, no. That's not nice to ask.

*Joshua:* What?

*Kiki:* Like form itself, style itself, what do you think about it? Like is it boring or too pale?

*Joshua:* Well, I mean it's kinda like – I mean it's not a story. I mean it doesn't have to be a story. I see it more of like – but I mean not much, you know, happens. They make dinner and the husbands come home and then that's just kinda what's going on.

So it seems almost like more of like a little – a vignette or more of like you're just sort of like giving an impression, sort of like an impressionist saying where the stuff's there and I mean it's not – I wouldn't call it boring. It's just that –

*Kiki:* Not very creative.

*Joshua:* I wouldn't even go that far. It's just that some parts are more interesting than others and the more interesting parts are when you devote your sort of, you know, focus to the people and not as much to sorta like, you know, the vegetables and the things around them.

Joshua was right to call the draft of this paper “impressionistic”: there is not much action in the piece. Kiki narrates the two women's stories from a distance. Much is left unsaid, but much can be inferred from the snapshot-like writing. Drawing on the assignment prompt, Joshua asked Kiki to incorporate more story into the piece. But Kiki's purpose was to capture how two women in two different places do the same acts – make meals for their families – and what the process of making those meals and mealtime itself reveals about how women in the two cultures view their roles.

I understand where Joshua was coming from and applaud him for considering the wider assignment. Because he had worked with Kiki so many times during the semester, he had a good

sense of what the rest of her portfolio looked like and remembered the “Thanksgiving” portion of the previous portfolio entries. The best advice Joshua gave Kiki was to think about giving the characters names which would help Kiki move away from presenting these women as “typical” and move toward her goal of representing two unique women.

Of all the papers in this study, it is safe to say that this is the one that is most extensively revised. Kiki rewrote almost the entire thing along the lines that Joshua suggested. However, the resulting paper is not nearly as complex and interesting as the draft.

Kiki’s revised draft begins with Keiko preparing a meal that her husband and son will take with them to the Nada Fighting Festival. Much of the first paragraph reads like a report as Kiki describes the festival: “The reason the festival is called as ‘Fighting Festival’ is because each year, one selected village from the seven villages presents a main traditional ritual in the festival, a fight with three wood arks. The fight does not look like a celebration whatsoever because of its roughness; some people unfortunately die in the fight if they are not cautious.” This is an instance that a creative writer would point to and say “show, don’t tell.” Whereas the first draft was understated, showing exactly how the women acted in their respective homes, in this draft, Kiki’s voice enters far more frequently to tell about the customs she describes.

The second paragraph is better; Kiki moves back to story-telling mode as she packs the men’s bags. The only image that she retains from the earlier draft is the description of chicken lined up “like an army [...] await[ing] a next trial.” In this draft, the children and husband also have names. The effect is that the mother, Kieko, is no longer the central figure. Instead, she is one of several.

Moving to the American family, Kiki begins with Kelly, a college student on her way home to Thanksgiving dinner. The parallelism between the two stories is broken here: instead of

focusing on the two mothers as Kiki claimed she intended to do, here she focuses on the daughter, Kelly. The mother, Mary, is introduced with a whole host of characters who are waiting at home, watching football and enjoying hors d'oeuvres prior to the Thanksgiving meal. Kiki's description of Mary does include some of the details associated with the previous mother: "Mary is in her late forties, but she looks as young as when she was thirty; her hairs are curled neatly and her earrings, eye shadow, ring, and shoes match with her blouse." Again, Mary's attention to her appearance pleases her husband: "Hey, you look lovely," Paul tells her.

Food and its preparation is not central to these revised stories but Kiki does stick in a few details that suggest the differences in preparation illuminated by the earlier draft. Mary tells Kelly, "I didn't make piecrusts for the cherry pie though...I cheated and bought the crusts." It's a small sentence, and in this draft, where food is no longer central, it is easy to miss the significance of this line contrasted with another single line for the Japanese section of the story: "She puts three or four different size pans on the stove and quickly prepares shellfish, vegetables, seaweeds, eggs and mushrooms...all the blessings from nature to cook." There's so much going on in the two halves of this paper that without knowing that the earlier draft examined the cooking practices of each woman, I am not sure the significance of the cooking would be apparent to a reader.

In almost every respect, I find the revision of this paper is less successful than the draft was: the focus shifts away from women and the roles they play; Kiki tells more and shows less; the imagery and details are less vivid and less striking in contrast with one another; the grammar and sentence structure, too, are less correct. But in one way this draft may be more effective than the previous one. The second part of Kiki's portfolio contrasted a woman's role in Japanese and American customs and traditions – specifically the Thanksgiving celebrations – from an

analytical perspective. Joshua remembered this paper and focused on the element of the assignment that encouraged students to begin thinking about combining it with Part Two. This is why he suggested returning to those celebrations. I think Kiki could have rewritten this paper with those celebrations in mind, but I think focusing on the celebration meals – as she focuses on an everyday meal in the draft – and the “sitting down to dinner” rituals on that day would have been supremely effective. Instead, she muddies the waters by introducing so many other acting characters.

Joshua didn't do a bad job in this session, and the degree of revision Kiki undertakes is quite impressive. But it is frustrating that the paper from this study that is most revised is also less interesting, subtle, and moving than the original. And even though I prefer the original to the revised version, Davis admired the final paper and Kiki earned an A. (I wonder what grade the draft would have earned – that is, if Davis and Joshua would have assessed it similarly.)

There are reasons why Kiki revised this paper so extensively. It is actually quite remarkable that a student with comparatively little experience writing and thinking in English undertakes such a substantial revision. Based on time speaking the language alone, one would probably assume that a native speaker like Max would be far more successful at and willing to overhaul a paper the night before it is due. Although issues of race, class, and gender were not the focus of my analysis, it is important to note that many of the first-year women in my study – especially Isabella, Kiki, and Michelle – seemed more willing to revise than the men, notably Max. However, this is a difficult claim to substantiate because my case study included six women but only three men, and the men used the writing center less frequently (which is also a notable gendered usage pattern). I would tentatively claim that Kiki revised more readily and thoroughly than some of the others because she seems prone to conforming to the expectations of

the authority figures around her (for example, converting to Christianity when she was sponsored by Lutheran families in Indiana), especially to men's expectations.<sup>32</sup>

Although completing overhauling a paper is always risky, because Kiki wrote this paper about 2/3 of the way through the semester, she already had significant practice revising and so it was less intimidating to Kiki to start over at this point in the semester than it would have been at any other point. This example suggests that students become more willing to revise the more they are asked to do it. Kiki gained significant confidence about writing due in no small part to the tutors – especially Joshua – with whom she worked. Even as Joshua questioned the examples in this paper, he so admired the paper he had helped her with the week before (an internal monologue) that he reminded her how good that paper was and encouraged her to use some of the techniques she used in that paper in the current paper: “I think it might be better if you tried to go about it the way you went about the one we talked about last week, the Faulkner one. People with real lives.” Kiki's very comfort with Joshua and her trust in his advice and guidance led her, I think, to overhaul this paper. The same kind of advice from another tutor, one with whom she had not previously worked, might not have resonated in the same way.

Although it turned out well in this case – Davis was impressed with Kiki's paper – this example should also serve as a cautionary tale (on several levels). First, it shows, once again, that readers of a given paper – in this case, Joshua, Davis and I – may have very different assessments of its strengths and weaknesses. Joshua based his comments about the paper on the assignment prompt (always a wise move) and that helped in this case. More importantly, however, it reveals how students can come to rely on tutors too much. Kiki's gut on this assignment was right. Her draft was solid, it did what the assignment asked, and it was

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<sup>32</sup> There is much more that could be said about issues of tutoring and race, class, and gender, and in the future I intend to return to the data I collected with such questions in mind.

interesting and subtle. But Kiki didn't rely on her gut; she revised her paper – re-envisioned it – based on a tutor's comments. One thing this session reminds me as a writing center administrator is that it is sometimes important to cut the strings and ask a student to try it on his or her own. Over-reliance on the writing center is uncommon, but when students begin to rely on it at the moment they could be testing their own wings a bit more, I have to question whether the mission of the writing center – to help students become independent writers and revisers – is being fulfilled.

### 4.3 CONCLUSIONS

Idealized claims about writing centers and the work done by students and tutors in them are nothing new. There are good reasons why so much writing center scholarship seems filled with portraits of the “magic” that happens in them, most obviously the need to secure funding so that we can keep doing what we do. In writing these chapters, I've also come to realize how difficult it is to criticize the work tutors do, even when there are things about which to be critical. For example, James takes a more directive approach than Max (and most teachers and writing center directors) would like. Matthew takes a line-by-line tutoring approach that leads him to miss Isabella's argument until forty minutes into the session, the point at which they need to begin wrapping up. The excerpts from the writing center sessions that I presented in Chapters 3 and 4, and in the chapters to come, offer, I think, a fairly representative sample of the sessions that take place in DePauw's writing center week in and week out, semester after semester. They are not ideal. There are many miscues. But, in most of the sessions presented here, students leave



the writing center empowered to make changes to their writing that they may not have made before their writing center sessions.

I frame the discussion in this chapter with excerpts from Stephen North's essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," the images of which North himself said in "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center'" "can be wonderfully inspiring, but they can outlive their usefulness, too, and come back to haunt us: mislead us, delude us or [...] lock us into trajectories which – should we persist in following them – are likely to take us places that we don't really want to go" (89). To continue on the trajectory of focusing on writers exclusively without attention to the writing they produce is to persist on a limited trajectory. Much recent research – many longitudinal studies – has asked the question, "How do students develop as writers?" The studies (notably the ones at Harvard and Pepperdine) have found that writing development is largely idiosyncratic, that some writers stall, that others tend to show more steady improvement. Like many others writing in Composition Studies, I think we have to be realistic about how much – in terms of students' development as writers – can be accomplished during a 14 week composition course. I do think that students' writing abilities develop unevenly. But I also think that the tutorials I have discussed in this chapter reveal that when students and tutors engage productively – James and Michelle, Jenna and Isabella, and even Joshua and Kiki – there is evidence of growth in the writing between the draft and the final version. Michelle's analysis of quotations is stronger: that's growth. Isabella rewrites her introduction and thesis statement into sentences that are readable and provocative: that too is growth. Though I prefer Kiki's draft, the revision has a stronger narrative which reflects greater understanding of the assignment itself. This is also a form of growth.

When I think about the nine students together and their entire semester's work, it is clear that Kiki and Isabella developed the most as writers: their products were "more better" than the others' by semester's end. They had the farthest to move, but they also used the writing center the most. I am not yet ready to claim that my study indicates that students who consistently use the writing center during first-year composition develop more linearly and steadily as writers: my sample is far too small to make any such claim. But, my research preliminarily suggests that students who consistently use the writing center and feel engaged with the work done there take greater chances with their revisions and make those revisions more successfully than (often more well-prepared) students who use the center less often.

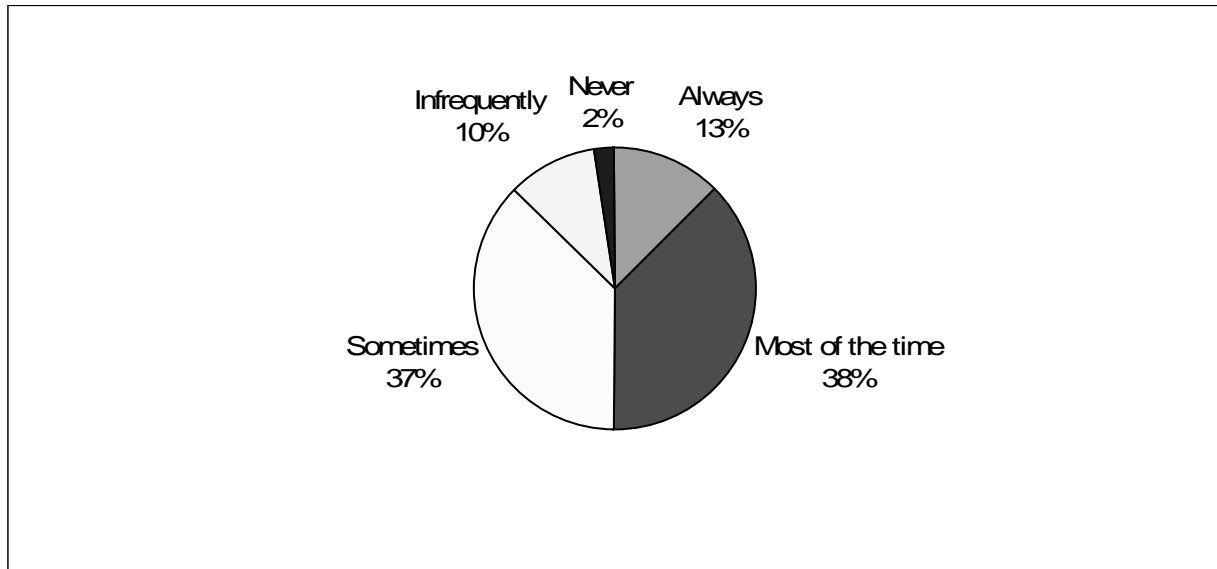
**5.0 IS ENOUGH EVER ENOUGH?:  
THE PROBLEMS AND THE POTENTIAL OF FEEDBACK FROM MULTIPLE  
SOURCES**

By now it should be clear that the two professors and nine students with whom I worked approached writing as a process enriched by various forms of collaboration. Davis and Schmidt incorporated classroom peer response into their assignments. Both made time for conferences with students about their drafts-in-progress. (Davis even responded to emails until 11 PM the night before his wife's scheduled C-Section.) But even so, students regularly turned to a tutor for additional feedback. The abundance of feedback students receive raises all sorts of questions about the revising process: are some individuals better equipped to provide feedback? Who? How do students determine what feedback to use? How do students deal with feedback that conflicts with other feedback they received? What problems and benefits arise for students when they are confronted with multiple perspectives about and readings of their papers?

**5.1 QUESTIONNAIRE DATA: THE VALUE OF FEEDBACK**

These questions are important not only for students in the case study, but have wider implications as well. Students who responded to my questionnaire (discussed in Chapter 1) seek feedback even more frequently than their teachers ask them to. More than half the students

reported that in high school they let or asked someone to read their writing before they turned it in “always” or “most of the time”; an additional 1/3 (slightly more, actually) had someone provide feedback at least sometimes.”



**Figure 5.** Did you let (or ask) someone else read your writing before you handed it in?

Given that the feedback I am most interested in comes from peer tutors who are trained to focus primarily on issues of writing related to content, I wondered what type of feedback students were used to receiving and how they valued that feedback. Therefore, I asked students to describe the feedback they received in two ways. First I offered this example:

Feedback on writing can pertain to many different aspects of your writing. For example, some feedback might be about punctuation errors and some feedback might be about whether your paper is organized effectively. There are many other possibilities. If you received feedback before you turned your work in, describe to what that feedback usually pertained.

As with the narrative answers I received to all the questions I asked, students’ responses to this question varied extensively. Students said that the feedback usually encouraged them to “add an

attention grabber,” “clarify main ideas,” “keep on topic,” and consider “word choice.” One student said that a reviewer pointed out “fundamental flaws in the thinking process” and still another was instructed to work on “hard to understand sentences.”

But even given the variation, the feedback students in this sample reported they most often received pertained to three main features: grammar (31 instances), organization (25 instances), and punctuation (18 instances). The follow-up question asked students to “describe the feedback about your writing that you found the most helpful.” Interestingly, students who usually received feedback about grammar, for example, didn’t always find that feedback most helpful. One student wrote that “Generally feedback was of a grammatical nature, checking the things like run-ons and other errors,” but that feedback was most helpful when it “made me think about the writing and changes it to a stronger version.” Another said that “Errors in grammar, punctuation, and paragraph layout” were commonly commented on, but that “Ideas for my writing” were more helpful.

In these types of responses, a sense of students’ priorities begins to emerge. The students who wrote the responses above understand that rethinking their work holds greater potential for learning than simply cleaning it up. Of the 21 students who listed “grammar” first as the most common type of feedback, more than half described something else – and usually a higher-order concern – as “most helpful”: “be more clear,” “general ideas for clarity, new topics,” “how to improve an idea I was trying to explain,” “is the paper to the point?”

On the other hand, these responses also confirm that some students prioritize grammar and other lower-order concerns when they revise. Fourteen students said that the most helpful feedback they receive pertains to grammar. However, many of them reported that the feedback

they usually received pertained to something more substantive. One student reported that her reviewers usually commented on –

- keeping the entire paper on topic with the thesis
- paragraph organization
- grammar

– but that the most helpful feedback related to “finding the spelling & grammatical errors.” The student who wrote that feedback he receives usually involves

- suggestions on ideas to incorporate
- grammar

found only “grammar” feedback most helpful. Another student was given feedback on many elements: “Feedback was normally an overview of grammar mistakes, places where the reader had questions, and places that should be re-worded. Sometimes it included an opinion about the paper.” But unlike most other students, this student offered insight into why “grammar help” was the most helpful: “I always lose points on that.” If high school students are regularly threatened with “losing points” because of mistakes in their grammar, it is easy to understand why making sure grammar is correct is a priority, and why feedback to that end is “most helpful.”<sup>33</sup>

Grammar, then, was clearly a major concern for these students when they were in high school. They often prioritize fixing grammatical mistakes even when reviewers have given them other ideas about what to work on. But these two questions also reveal that students value feedback from others when it reveals to them things that they did not see themselves. Sometimes, as in the case of the student above, this means simply pointing out errors or problems of communication that students miss because they read what they *intended* to write and not what

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<sup>33</sup> Recall that Michelle claimed to have been severely penalized for grammar and punctuation errors.

they have actually written. One student most values readers who catch “things that don’t sound wrong to me because I wrote them.” This comment reminds me of a student with whom I once worked in the writing center. Her professor had covered the right-hand margin of her paper with the comment “awk.” She looked me in the eye and said, “But it’s not awkward to me. I wrote it!” The student who wrote the comment above seems to suggest something similar: “I wouldn’t put on paper something that I know is ‘wrong.’ I need help identifying those things that ‘sound’ right to me but do not align with what is expected in academic discourse.”

Another student justified prioritizing comments about “the little things that I had overlooked such as spelling and mechanics” because “when you are proofreading your own work, the most obvious errors are often overlooked so it is very helpful to receive that type of feedback.” This sentiment was often echoed: “a viewpoint from a fresh set of eyes...is always a little hard to take, but always useful.” The number of students who reported that they always or nearly always asked for feedback from an outsider suggests that there is wide support for the opinion that “it is always helpful to have an outside reader, because they quickly notice awkward sentences, wordiness, or any confusing paragraphs.”

And while many students seem to value “feedback for feedback’s sake,” others were quick to point out that not all feedback is created equal. Many valued feedback that provided specific, concrete suggestions or prompts toward improvement. Students cited reviewers who “helped me come up with new ideas,” who “ask question that would help broaden my view on my work,” and who provided “examples of how to better my work” as the best readers. The student who found examples helpful said that those examples led her to become “more aware of what I was writing. I was able to concentrate more on main ideas and not extra topics” (student’s emphasis).

Still others found they benefited most when reviewers engaged them in thinking more critically about what they had written. One student said that reviewers who “challenge[d] my topic” were most helpful and she provided the following illustration: “For example, ‘You said in the paper....but what about this or that? How do you respond to these ideas?’” (student’s emphasis). Questions like these invited this writer into a dialogue with the responder and became a form of instruction and not only judgment. Another student offered a similar sense that the best feedback “inspires further exploration into the content matters.” In these last two responses, there are glimmers of the excitement Nancy Sommers claims students receive when feedback reinforces “students’ sense of themselves as thinkers” (“Re-Visions” 225). Although Sommers discusses college students, these responses illustrate that even in high school, some students have begun to see feedback as “an invitation to contribute something of their own to an academic conversation” and they see it as such because “students imagine their instructors as readers waiting to learn from their contributions, not readers waiting to report what they’ve done wrong on a given paper” (“Re-Visions” 255).

In addition to revealing that students seek feedback about their work and have clear expectations about to what that feedback ought to pertain, the questionnaire data revealed that more than three-fourths of students seek feedback from multiple sources.

- Nearly 50% (43/87) said a teacher who assigned the writing read their drafts
- 60% said a single peer from class read their drafts
- Parents (or a parental figure) read drafts of 56% (49/87)
- Some students also said a different teacher, a peer response group, and a friend from outside of class read their drafts
- Only 20% (17/87) said they were the primary readers of their work



While it is perhaps no surprise that “a single peer from the class for which the paper was assigned” is the reader students most frequently report – this finding corresponds to the finding (reported in Chapter 1) that 93% of the students in my sample were asked to participate in some form of peer response – the frequency of other responses calls for more speculation.

Why do students turn to friends from outside of class almost as frequently as they work with peer response groups? Why do they turn to parents/parental figures slightly more often than they turn to the teachers who assigned the writing? And because they turn to parents in such a large proportion, will they continue to call upon parents while they are at college? E-mail and inexpensive cell phone plans make such communication with home easy.<sup>34</sup> But if one goal of writing in college is for students to examine their assumptions, will they be as willing to examine them if an audience they will turn to is their parents (who may have influenced their children’s assumptions)? While these are not the central questions the present study seeks to answer, they are potentially important questions to ask in the age of instant messaging.

Most of the nine students in my case study turned to multiple sources for feedback about their work. In both College Writing sections, students were “required” to participate in peer response activities. Students in both sections frequently conversed with or emailed their professors about their work. Some told me they continued to email drafts of papers to their parents at home. And they all worked with tutors in the writing center on at least one occasion. With all the feedback students received, it should be no surprise that readers did not always agree with one another.

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<sup>34</sup> DePauw’s student body is almost exclusively residential.

## 5.2 THE PROBLEMS OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

### 5.2.1 Problem 1: Assignment Prompts Do Not Always Convey Teacher Expectations

As the tutorial session between Kiki and Hilary in Chapter 3 reveals, students often turn to tutors to help them understand what a given assignment asks them to do. After studying the first portfolio assignment, Hilary helped Kiki figure out how to proceed. But the assignment prompts teachers distribute do not always convey precisely what the teacher expects. In other cases, prompts fail to adequately convey the range of possible topics or approaches to a prompt that an instructor will deem appropriate to the assigned task. Thus, sometimes when students turn to readers outside of their classrooms, the perspective rendered conflicts with the teacher's expectations for that assignment. For example, in Portfolio Assignment 2 (see the "golf paper" tutorial between James and Max in Chapter 4), Davis asked students to craft an argument. Based on the guidelines given, James identified the paper's weakness – there isn't an argument – gave specific, direct suggestions, and then engaged Max in an extensive conversation about those ideas. When Max appeared hesitant to take those suggestions because he wasn't sure he could elaborate on the ideas enough to fill six pages, James introduced the idea of "counterargument," asked good questions, and scribed a few ideas to help Max revise his paper. I noted in Chapter 4 that Max made few changes to his paper and instead filled out the outline he had made prior to visiting the writing center. Davis's largely positive comments on the final draft of the paper were therefore surprising.

Next to Max's thesis statement – "It is undisputable that golf has a stereotype, but over the past decade its image has been improving" – Davis wrote, "good clear argument." It's hard to agree with this statement. Although Max's sentence is precisely and clearly worded, I find it a

weak argument at best. In the draft that James read, the sentence read “changing and improving;” perhaps the switch to “improving” alone does add some room for argument. It’s possible that some people – perhaps the administration at Augusta? – regard the inclusion of women and minorities in the sport negatively, but Max never introduces us to anyone who says, “it’s too bad that golf is becoming popular among women and minorities.” Like James, I find the thesis hardly argumentative.

So why did Davis compliment it? In his end comment, Davis noted that Max’s paper “present[s] a clear discussion of the way the image of golf has changed in the last decade, in part through the emergence of figures like Annika Sorenstam, Tiger Woods, and Michelle Wie; and in part through conscious efforts by the PGA and USGA to bring the game to new markets.” The key word here is “discussion.” Max presented a one-sided discussion of the game of golf and changes to it in the past decade. But nowhere did he suggest why such an inquiry is important. I think he missed a major portion of the assignment. Nonetheless, the paper earned a high grade, an A-.

What can account for the disparity between what Davis said he wanted in the prompt and what he actually valued in the completed essay? Davis’s concept of this assignment was wider than he stated on the assignment printed in the syllabus. In fact, he addressed this very point during class time: “Some of you have been to the W center about your current papers and they’ve been telling you that you need an argument,” he began. “They’re doing their jobs: the assignment prompt says you have to have an argument.” He followed this comment with a big “but”: “the essay can also be more expository.”

Here Davis defended the good work that the tutors in the writing center were doing when they are equipped with an assignment prompt and a student paper. But this moment in class and

Max's experience also highlight one of the inherent problems that can arise with tutoring of any kind: the tutor rarely, if ever, knows what, precisely, is required of a given writing task.<sup>35</sup> James was aware of this as a tutor and began to raise the professor's expectations as a question during the session: "It's kind of hard for me to tell from the assignment what the professor wants. So can you tell – does he want..." James didn't finish his question and instead gave Max his perspective on what the assignment asked for: "I was thinking of it as a debate kind of thing. [...]. I don't know if you can set up a debate: golf is changing or golf isn't changing." During this moment, James was on the verge of questioning whether or not Max knew any more about Davis's expectations for the assignment. And Max never offered that he did know that it could be more expository (which was the type of writing they practiced as they modeled Montaigne).

This session and others in the study illustrate that as effective as tutors often are, they are not teachers and because they do not attend the classes in which the students they tutor are enrolled, tutors cannot be aware of verbal changes or modifications made to written prompts (unless, of course, students inform them of such changes). This means that the advice tutors offer will sometimes conflict with advice a student's teacher would give or an expectation the teacher may hold about what the final product should accomplish.

However, the confusion about what a teacher really expects from an assignment does not mean that such sessions are wasted. The questions James asked Max about his subject were valid and interesting questions. They made Max think about his subject in ways he had not previously. This session provided exactly the kind of conversation that Bruffee claims "academics most

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<sup>35</sup> Another model of peer tutoring – Harvey Kail John Trimbur refer to it as a "curriculum-based model" – "seems to grown out of the premise that if peer tutoring is good for those who seek it voluntarily" (in a writing center, for example), then it is better to require it of all students (204). Thus, at some institutions, tutors are "attached" to writing and writing-intensive courses and tutor within a classroom setting. Thus, curriculum-based tutors know the course material and content.

value,” one that is “emotionally involved, intellectual and substantively focused” (210). In verbalizing some of his opinions, Max began to understand how others might hear his position that women should not be allowed to play on the PGA tour. He said more than once, “I don’t want to sound like that I’m against like women and stuff....,” but he also learned that he had to back up his assertions more fully in order to not be dismissed as, simply, sexist. True, Max did not put this new knowledge to work in this draft of this paper. But it is rare to see the immediate application of new-found knowledge.

I can’t say for certain that Max will realize how valuable his session with James could be to future writing assignments, but this session was exactly the sort of session that writing center scholars imagine “help produce better writers.” Such a session, the reasoning goes, models to and engages students in the rigorous and analytical discussion that writers must engage themselves in whenever they compose for academic and professional settings.

### **5.2.2 Problem 2: Tutors (May) Give Students False Confidence**

The interplay between tutor voices and teacher voices complicates the revision process in other ways, too. In taking their role to help give writers confidence seriously, tutors are sometimes unrealistic about the weaknesses in a student’s draft.

Pamela’s first experience with the writing center left her less than impressed. I asked her about her first writing center session when I interviewed her a few days after it:

*Margaret:* Did you feel like [your expectations] were pretty well met when you left [the writing center]?

*Pamela:* Well, yeah. I was, like, really happy with the advice that she gave me about what to fix. So I met with [Rebecca] in the writing center on Wednesday, and then Thursday I went to see Professor Schmidt.

*Margaret:* Mm hmm.

*Pamela:* And it was just weird because, like, I was feeling really confident on everything, but when I went to see Professor Schmidt she just totally, like, cut my paper in half and, like, re-did my whole thesis and everything.

Reports like these – of students feeling good about writing center tutorials until they meet with their professors who have different expectations – are, unfortunately, not uncommon. Julie Bauer Morrison and Jean-Paul Nadeau conducted a study of fifty-three students enrolled in a psychology class who were required to visit the writing center for a given paper. The idea for the study began when the psychology professor – Morrison – overheard comments from her students that they were displeased with the advice they had been given by writing center tutors. As is the case in many writing centers, most of the students in Morrison and Nadeau’s study rated their sessions as overwhelmingly positive on the writing center evaluations; their sentiments changed upon receiving their graded work.

Morrison and Nadeau (the associate director of the Academic Center for Excellence and Writing Center) wanted to learn what caused students’ perceptions of the writing center tutorials to change. They focused most on the change in perception related to the letter-grade students earned on their work. Thus, their primary research question was “what is the correlation between the grade earned on a paper and the change in satisfaction with a student’s writing center conference?” (27).

Upon completing their study, Morrison and Nadeau found “students’ satisfaction ratings were lower post-grade than pre-grade, and the drop was significant, with the average rating decreasing from a 4.81 to a 3.74 out of 5” (31). Moreover, students’ satisfaction decreased no matter what grade they earned, but students who earned As decreased their ratings less than those

who earned Bs, Cs, and Ds. It seems likely that, if she had been given the opportunity, Pamela, too, would have rated her experience in the writing center differently – less positively – after meeting with Schmidt. Schmidt did not assign a grade to her paper during their conference, but Pamela clearly felt that Schmidt had not been pleased with her draft which is in some ways similar to receiving a lower-than-expected grade.

Pamela chose the same assignment topic to work on as her classmates, Rachel and Isabella:

In her personal essay “What Did You Expect?” (Convergences 71), Dorothy Allison rejects being represented as a cliché. Write an essay in which you discuss Allison’s representation of herself in “What Did You Expect.”

Although Pamela’s writing is much cleaner and clearer than Isabella’s, she is less successful at identifying the complexities of Allison’s representation of herself. In fact, despite a promising – though somewhat broadly stroked – opening paragraph, the body of Pamela’s paper largely summarizes Allison’s essay. The introductory paragraph covers an array of ideas:

Sentence 1: Definition of metaphor

Sentence 2: Allison’s use of metaphors contributes to how she portrays her insecurities

Sentence 3: Examples of some of the stereotypes she fights

Sentence 4: Whose stereotypes she fights

Sentence 5: Allison struggles with confidence because of these negative metaphors

Sentence 6: “Allison examines how she has fought to get rid of her class stereotype,” how she has taken a different road than her mother and sister, and how the mask she puts up to society hurts her self-esteem

Breaking down the paragraph this way reveals its inverted triangle shape: she starts with a big definition (of “metaphor,” which she seems to use interchangeably with “stereotype” throughout the paper) and gradually works her way to a thesis that relies on that definition and its application to the essay.

Although Schmidt expressly warned them against writing a five-paragraph paper and a three-pronged thesis, Pamela’s thesis is essentially three-pronged and her paper contains five paragraphs. The thesis lacks an argumentative thrust; it essentially claims that the rest of the paper will summarize the three things Pamela thinks Allison does in her essay. On the other hand, the punctuation in Pamela’s final sentence does leave open the possibility that she is making a claim: “...Allison examines how she has fought to get rid of her class stereotypes for many years and how she has chosen to take the road less traveled by compared to her sister and mother; in the end, however, Allison realizes the mask she puts up to society is not helping her self-esteem, it is only hurting her.” Given the semi-colon and the phrase “in the end,” it seems Pamela will claim that by insulating herself with a metaphor of her own, Allison hurts herself.

But Pamela is not persuasive on this point. Her paragraphs move through Allison’s essay and summarize the following scenarios from “What Did You Expect?”:

Paragraph 2: Struggles with stereotypes of southern typecasts and how photographers represent Allison

Paragraph 3: Feeling judged by others based on what they think an author should look like and Allison’s failure to conform to that stereotype

Paragraph 4: Comparison of Allison to her mother and the way her mother wore make-up like “war paint” (metaphor)



Although a significant portion of the introduction set up “metaphors,” the word “metaphor” appears only in the fourth paragraph. The thesis claims that Allison puts a mask up to society, but Pamela never clarifies what that “mask” is.

When Pamela worked with Rebecca – a junior and brand new tutor (this may have been the first session Rebecca ever tutored) – Pamela said that on the first response paper she had turned in to Schmidt, “I just had problems with my sentence structure, like getting across the point.” Pamela wanted help with getting her point across and also with “making sure that things flow nicely and stuff like that.” Although Schmidt stressed in class the importance of an “overarching thesis,” Pamela did not seem concerned about this part of her paper.

Rebecca’s main concern with Pamela’s paper – one that she voiced throughout the conference – was that Pamela had not fully explained what stereotypes and typecasts constrained Allison. In other words, because Pamela did not provide information about Allison’s childhood setting, Rebecca had a difficult time understanding why Allison would feel so guilty about breaking free from those stereotypes.

*Rebecca:* Okay, one thing that I was a little confused about – [...]. You kind of jump right into it and you talk about her struggle with her mom and her sisters and her class background without exactly saying, well, “she’s from the era of southern” – you know what I mean?

*Pamela:* Okay.

*Rebecca:* Without exactly saying where she’s from.

*Pamela:* Where she’s from.

*Rebecca:* You could – you know, somewhere in your introduction say, like, well, she struggles so much with this because she’s from wherever in the 1960’s or whatever it happens to be. You know what I mean?

*Pamela:* Okay.

*Rebecca:* And kind of write down – describe why she struggles with her mom, sisters, background. And another thing that would make sense by putting it into, like, a time period, could be why does she have such a hard time with being a writer, because it's not feminine? Because people expect her to be feminine, she doesn't want to be? And it's kind of what I gathered from it, but it didn't quite make sense at the beginning, why she had such an issue with being a writer.

*Pamela:* Okay. Mm hmm.

In this exchange, Rebecca explained why providing more of Allison's background information would help orient readers to Allison and her struggles. Looking ahead, Rebecca also suggested that if Pamela set up Allison's family background, she could use the conclusion to suggest how Allison overcomes her background:

*Rebecca:* And so if you just set the reader up just a little bit more, not too much. And then this is a very good thesis right here, that she puts up this mask and it's hurting her, but she thought that it would initially protect her from society. Just kind of like a contradiction of sorts, I suppose, but perhaps you could also say she realizes that the mask that she puts up hurts her, but what does she do about it? Does she do anything, make a decision?

*Pamela:* Okay.

*Rebecca:* And then what is good about this, you can maybe bring up in the conclusion what she does about it.

What interests me about Rebecca's tutoring strategy is that she was both dealing with the whole paper and failing to see the whole paper at the same time. For example, in the exchange above, Rebecca suggested a way for Pamela to conceive of her thesis statement as something to set up the paper and to round out the paper: in the introduction, Pamela says that Allison puts up a mask that ultimately hurts her, and Rebecca encouraged her to address what she does about this detrimental mask in the conclusion. On the other hand, when Rebecca evaluated "this is a very good thesis right here, that she puts up this mask and it's hurting her, but she thought that it

would initially protect her from society,” she failed to consider whether or not the thesis statement “arches-over” and pervaded the whole paper. It doesn’t.

In part, Pamela struggled with this assignment – “to discuss Allison’s representation of herself” – because throughout “What Did You Expect?,” Allison represents herself mostly by suggesting what she is *not*: she is not comfortable having her photo taken; she is not comfortable in the classy inn in Charleston; she is not a member of the working class, even though she was when she grew up; she is not who she wanted to grow up to be. What could Pamela say *is* the mask that Allison wears? Allison claims that her “persona is as much a conscious rejection of [her] mother’s armored features as it is an attempt not to cater to the prejudices and assumptions of a culture that seems to want to look at women like me” (77-78). Of course, the question remains, what defines a “woman like Allison?”

The draft Pamela took to the writing center lacked a clear focus. There wasn’t “an overarching thesis.” How did Rebecca miss that? I’m not sure. One explanation is that she’s a young and inexperienced tutor who felt nervous enough about tutoring, let alone being taped for my study. Another explanation is that Pamela’s paper covered what her “thesis” said it would cover, but “covering” and “arguing” or “claiming” are clearly different tasks. Therefore, the established thesis statement and paragraphs that follow were somewhat seductive. As an outsider, it is clear to me that despite the fact that she had good intentions, Rebecca didn’t substantially help Pamela move this paper forward.

Rebecca did, however, give Pamela confidence about her writing. The very first thing she told Pamela during the session was that “I found your essay very easy to read through. I didn’t see any major problems with the way you put sentences together and such. It made a lot of sense, although I have not read [Allison’s essay].” And writing centers have historically

imagined themselves as places where students gain confidence, as places “beyond the competition, evaluation, and grade-grubbing that supposedly marks the classroom” (Carino, “Power” 102). According to much writing center theory, helping students feel confident about their ability to complete writing tasks is one of the most important jobs a tutor does. But initially tutors help students feel more confident by helping them understand how to improve some aspect of their writing or the assignment on which they are working. In this case, Rebecca almost said, “You should feel really confident about this piece because it’s good; let’s work on these couple things.”

In her interview with me, Pamela revealed that during her meeting with Schmidt, Schmidt “re-did my whole thesis.” Knowing that Schmidt emphasized thesis statements and unique arguments, I asked Pamela to explain how Schmidt “re-did” it. She answered, “She’s – we went over what, like, I wanted to say and then she told me how I could make it better. It just ended up being, like, this brand new thesis of whole new ideas, and it’s basically just like a whole new paper.” Because I don’t have the draft that Schmidt and Pamela worked on during their conference, it is hard to know whether Pamela’s assertion that Schmidt “redid everything” is accurate. Her memory of Rebecca’s assessment – “the person at the Writing Center told me that – [...] it flowed really well and I had really good ideas” – was fairly accurate. But if Schmidt expected an overhaul of the paper, beginning with the thesis, she did not see one. In the final version of the paper, the thesis changed (italicized below) very little:

#### Writing Center Version

In Dorothy Allison’s blunt personal essay “What Did You Expect?” Allison examines how she has fought to get rid of her class stereotypes for many years and how she has chosen to take the road less traveled by compared to her sister and mother; in the end, however, Allison realizes the mask she puts up to society is not helping her self-esteem, it is only hurting her.

### Final Version

*In the 1998 essay “What Did You Expect?”, Allison examines how she has fought to get rid of her class stereotype for many years and how she has chosen to take the road less traveled. In the end, however, Allison realizes the mask she puts up to be accepted by society is not helping her self-esteem: it is only hurting her.*

Though Pamela claimed that Schmidt gave her a “brand new thesis” with which to work, these two passages vary little. Only a few phrases have been omitted from the original. Indeed, in her end comments, Schmidt wrote, “I appreciate the work you put into revising your draft...but as it stands, your thesis statement is not quite persuasive. You never make it clear what ‘the mask [Allison] puts on’ is precisely.” In other words, the problem that existed when Pamela took this draft to the writing center still persists.

Like many first-year students, Pamela mastered the five paragraph theme in high school. For her first attempt at essay writing in college, she stuck with this format, but try as she might, she could not make it work. Actually, she might have been able to write this paper in five paragraphs. What no one said about this essay is that Pamela mostly summarized Allison’s essay and tried to apply pop psychology to it. Neither the tutor, (nor her classroom peer reader), asked her to explain Allison’s mask. I don’t know whether or not Schmidt did. But clarifying that, alone, would have significantly helped this paper.

Most tutors suggest that students visit their professors for help with their writing because they know that teachers ultimately decide whether or not a paper is successful. Tutors can also help students feel confident that they will not, in one student’s words, “make a fool of himself,” when they meet with their teachers. But sometimes tutors instill too much confidence in the writers with whom they work and students feel frustrated when their teachers find less to be

excited about than the tutor did. Pamela reflected that her experience “made me wonder, really, if the writing center, like, really knew what they were doing.”

### **5.2.3 Problem3: A Teacher’s Stamp of Approval (May) Deter Revision**

For all the good things that writing center tutors may do, they do not – were never meant to – take the place of teachers and the guidance teachers can give students in their composition courses. Recall that after Isabella turned in her first paper, Schmidt met with her to work on clarifying her ideas and the sentences that contained them. Isabella continued to meet with both tutors and with Schmidt throughout the term but usually met with tutors before meeting with Schmidt. However, for her last paper, Isabella met with Schmidt prior to meeting with a tutor. The last assignment Schmidt gave her students required them to compose personal essays: “This semester we have been reading numerous personal essays by a variety of authors. Here is your opportunity to try your hand at writing one yourself.” Schmidt gave several specific options related to the readings students had done during the final weeks of class. One of those readings was N. Scott Momaday’s “The Way to Rainy Mountain” anthologized in *Convergences: Method, Message, Medium*. In this essay, Momaday, who grew up on an Indian reservation, reflects on the significance of this mountain – “a single knoll” – that “rises out of the plain in Oklahoma” (273). The space is “sacred” to him because it was a landmark to his ancestors and is near where his grandmother is buried. Isabella chooses to work on the following topic: “Imagine the opposite of sacred space. Try describing it. Is it public? Private? What purposes does it serve? Use Momaday’s essay as a reference in your exploration as a writer.”

Unlike most of the assignments for Schmidt’s college writing class, the final assignment asked students to draw on personal experience. In addition, Schmidt did not ask for an explicitly

stated thesis, although she did note that personal essays “share certain conventions with more ‘academic’ essays. Your paragraphs have to have a focus. You need to create a narrative thread that connects your writing. In other words, your essay has to be coherent and cohesive.” Although Schmidt envisioned the products for this assignment would be more experimental than for previous assignments, she still expected students would incorporate some of the knowledge they had gained about writing effective thesis statements and topic sentences into this final assignment.

The draft of Isabella’s paper grapples with the question “what is the opposite of sacred space?” Drawing on a personal experience of riding the elevated Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) trains in Chicago, a discussion in class about the way one ought to behave in sacred space, and a hypothetical example of wedding site, Isabella attempts to show that no space is inherently sacred. The second paragraph of Isabella’s draft hints at her argument, or her thoughts, about the opposite of sacred space:

Sacred or non-sacred spaces can be anything we want it to be. However we see it, what we think of it, and how much it is favored, is relevant in making such a decision. People, the majority, and our capacity to create and destroy ultimately have the final word to pronounce if space is either sacred or non-sacred.

Isabella’s sentence structure continues to muddy her meaning somewhat, but she seems to be saying that whether a space is considered “sacred” or not is determined by a “majority rules” kind of system. In her paragraph about the CTA train, Isabella seems to suggest that although the space is a public one, “people us[e] the time spent consumed attending to their own things.” Spaces that seem public can, thus, be used in private ways. Conversely, even though a beach

might be a public, non-sacred space to most people, to the woman who decides to marry there at sundown, the space is sacred.

In another paragraph, Isabella reflects on the actions of visitors to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington DC (the subject of one of the essays they read for class); this example conveys a slightly different argument. Isabella's classmate, Pamela, mentioned that when she visited the Memorial Wall at age five, her mother told her to stop misbehaving. Pamela claimed that she did not understand that the place was "sacred" and thus could not be expected to know how to act. Isabella takes from this example that we give special treatment to sacred spaces, but she also suggests that places are not inherently sacred, but rather, that we must learn what spaces are sacred and how to act appropriately in them.

Isabella met with Schmidt about her draft and based on the comments written on them, it seems the two brainstormed significantly about the focus of Isabella's essay. At the top of the first page, Schmidt wrote, "Whether a space is sacred or profane depends on how the people who enter it regard it." This statement echoes the rather jumbled paragraph that had functioned as a thesis statement. It also helped Isabella focus the purpose of her essay which is not exclusively the nature of non-sacred spaces. Instead, Isabella explores how a given space can be both sacred and non-sacred depending on who views and/or enters it. This idea comes out most clearly in her conclusion: "I do not think I can stress it enough of the roles we play as participants of non-or sacred spaces. Yes, what we hold sacred depends on how much value we see in a space."

Isabella's revised draft also suggests that she and Schmidt brainstormed about additional ideas. She added a new paragraph drawn from her conversation with Schmidt:

Discussing my paper with my writing professor on a Sunday afternoon about why Momaday and the Kowa's embrace the sacredness of the land versus



the average citizen, she introduces me to the thought of different people's take about spaces. Adjacent to most of the studious students in the café in the library, as some recited their French presentations, it dawned on us who would consider the library sacred.

Isabella relates how she told Schmidt most students do not see a library as sacred, but as a place for work. However, Schmidt suggested to her that librarians may consider the library sacred. "In almost a whisper," Isabella writes that Schmidt told her that "librarians really do not want others to touch *their* books." This example furthers Isabella's claim that the sacredness of a space depends upon how those who enter it regard it. Isabella's account of her conference with Schmidt illustrates how thoughtful conversations with teachers can clarify concepts in students' minds.

After meeting with Schmidt but prior to taking her draft to the writing center, Isabella changed portions of her draft, including the revision of her thesis as discussed above. She also reorganized the paper with the CTA paragraph now the first body paragraph. Placing this body paragraph first immediately introduces the idea that a space can be simultaneously two things: private and public, sacred and non-sacred. Although it is not abundantly clear that Isabella's point is to show how the CTA example – one that is familiar to any rider of public transportation – sets up the later, more abstract examples, a careful reader notices the pattern.

This paper is fairly interesting. All the examples Isabella uses – some personal, some drawn from textual examples – highlight the point she wants to make. This is not to say that the paper couldn't benefit from further revision. Because the transitions are sometimes weak and sometimes Isabella fails to articulate exactly what she means her examples to show, the paper does not have the "cohesive" feel that readers, especially Schmidt, expect. Some statements that

she makes seem rather irrelevant. For example, she writes, “Aesthetics or architecture of a space can influence our way of seeing space as special or not.” This statement opens the paragraph about Pamela’s visit to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial. The problem is that the aesthetics and architecture of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Wall aren’t really the focus of the paragraph. Rather, her point, it seems, is that because Pamela was only five years old and did not understand how sacred most people think the Memorial is, she cannot really be held accountable for acting, literally, her age. Thus, Isabella suggests that if one does not know a space is sacred, then one cannot be expected to treat it that way.

In the writing center, Isabella worked with Matthew, the sophomore tutor with whom she had worked previously. In earlier sessions with Jenna and with Matthew, Isabella was a fairly timid writer who quickly cited her many struggles with writing. But in this session, she seemed far more confident both about what she wanted to say and how she had said it prior to coming to the center. Part of her confidence comes, no doubt, from the conference she had with Schmidt. While it is important that students seek feedback from their professors, in this case, Isabella seemed fairly resistant to much of what Matthew had to say because, in her words, “my professor didn’t mention that.” For example, early in the session, Matthew read aloud her opening sentence: “The opposite of sacred space, to me, means having no boundaries.” He suggested that because “it’s pretty clear that it’s your opinion,” Isabella did not need to say “to me.”

- Matthew:* So you don't have to say "to me."
- Isabella:* Okay.
- Matthew:* Like, the professor is gonna assume it's your opinion, so you normally don't even have to say that.
- Isabella:* Okay. But, like, I showed her this paper before I came here –
- Matthew:* Okay.
- Isabella:* But, like, she doesn't mention anything. Or should I just, like, cross it out anyway because she knows it's a personal paper?

As this excerpt reveals, tutoring is sometimes harder when students have met with their professors prior to visiting the writing center. Isabella questioned Matthew's authority almost immediately in the session because he pointed out something that her teacher didn't mention. Matthew responded kindly, appropriately:

- Matthew:* I don't know. You know, it might have been that she just wanted to focus on the big stuff.
- Isabella:* Okay.
- Matthew:* I think that's just a good general rule of thumb.
- Isabella:* Right.

A similar conversation occurred over the very next sentence: "There are no 'no trespassing' signs to be cautious of." Isabella plays with signs and sign motifs a few times in her paper, an attempt, I think, to do something metaphorical, something fairly sophisticated. In terms of the "no trespassing" sign, Isabella meant to suggest that people who regard a space as sacred want to prevent others from entering it, or at least from using a sacred space in a non-sacred way. Matthew claimed he didn't understand the relevance of this sentence "to the big picture":

- Isabella:* Like, well, sacred space is, like, more you have to watch out for, more people can't touch or, you know, can't do. So, like, in a not sacred space, you're more likely to just do whatever you want, so that's why I figured the no trespassing signs.
- Matthew:* Okay. I guess when you said the "no trespassing signs," I thought you were talking about a certain situation, so maybe if you could make it more of a general statement.
- Isabella:* So, like, I thought that was actually pretty general, but – cause it's still referring to opposite of sacred space from the first sentence.
- Matthew:* I think that the idea of the sentence is good, but maybe there's another word for – an idea for "no trespassing signs." I guess I'm kind of worried that you're not saying anything different than you said in the first sentence.
- Isabella:* Oh, okay. I thought it was cool. She did like it, though.
- Matthew:* She did?
- Isabella:* Yeah.

As the conversation continued, Matthew maintained his position that the first two sentences seem to say the same thing and that Isabella should consider eliminating the second one. However, he also understood that if Schmidt admired the sentence – that if Isabella herself wanted to keep the sentence – she should retain it: "Well, I'll leave that up to you if you want to say it. [...] I think you're basically rephrasing the same thing, but if you want to, keep it." The above exchange reveals how difficult it can be to tutor a student who has already met with her professor: Isabella continued to say, "My professor didn't mention that" or "My professor liked that," throughout the session. This, I think, made it difficult for Matthew to offer suggestions; he must have felt like he was on the defensive during the whole session.

While I can imagine that Matthew felt frustrated by working with someone so resistant to his suggestions, I found the way Isabella pushed back really exciting. From the perspective of a teacher, Isabella's resistance indicates that she is taking control and ownership of her work in a

way she has not until this point. (Of course, Isabella probably didn't resist her teacher's authority when they met.) When Matthew and Isabella worked on the section about the conversation Isabella and Schmidt had about who considered a library "sacred," Matthew again read from Isabella's paper: "After the statement escaped her breath, arguing about that was not necessary."

*Isabella:* Yeah, like, I didn't have – I agreed with her, basically. Is that an odd sentence?

*Matthew:* Yeah, I think it is. So really all you're saying in that sentence is you agree with her?

*Isabella:* Yeah, but I like saying it cool.

*Matthew:* Yeah. Not bad every once in a while just to throw in a simple sentence too. You know, they don't all have to be really long.

*Isabella:* So after – okay, "arguing about that was not necessary" makes it odd, or even the first part?

*Matthew:* I just felt like you used a lot of words....

*Isabella:* Just to say "I agree with you."

Isabella controlled this portion of the session by asking Matthew if he thought her sentence is "odd." Isabella showed that she has learned that even though she wants to say things in a "cool" way, there are sometimes problems associated with such phrasings because ultimately they sound "odd."

During the session, Matthew asked terrific questions, some of which encouraged Isabella to clarify her ideas ("But what did riding the city bus cause you to realize?") and some of which encouraged her to clarify her sentences ("Could you explain this sentence, right here?"). Two other real strengths of the session were Matthew's patience and the fact that Isabella did as much, if not more, of the talking than he did. Although it was sometimes difficult for Isabella to

hear it, Matthew gave her a very real sense of parts that were unclear and parts where she failed to convey her intentions.

But this session also underscores the problems that can be associated with too much feedback, especially when the feedback comes from sources who have different degrees of authority. Sometimes the advice given by multiple sources will conflict. When this happens, students must wade through the advice and determine for themselves how best to incorporate the changes suggested by those sources. In a way, it is when students receive conflicting advice that they are most in control of the revisions they make. When faced with multiple options, students cannot simply adopt the advice they have been given; rather, they must analyze their options and make decisions about what to change and how to change it. Revisions then become writer-based – “What do I want to say and how can I most effectively say it?” – within a reader-based – “what does my audience require from me?” – framework.

The examples presented in this chapter involve students receiving feedback from teachers and from peer tutors. In all three cases, students resisted tutors’ authority, and they resisted it for a variety of reasons all having to do with the greater authority that teachers have over a paper’s evaluation. This important finding should give pause to those who direct and promote writing centers. If students perceive that tutors have missed the mark their professors have set – because tutors don’t fully understand the assignment, because they are “too nice,” or because they comment on things not mentioned by the professor – they may not use the center’s services, or worse, they will tell others not to use the writing center. Of course, a sample of three is not adequate to draw large conclusions, but these examples suggest that students value their teachers’ evaluations more than peer tutors’. And yet, when given the opportunity, students will

seek feedback from both sources, thus echoing the questionnaire's findings that indicated that students think if feedback is good, then more feedback is better.

In this case, Isabella makes only a few changes after her session with Matthew. She does add a title – “This Sacred Space Reserved For...” – which, with its sign-like quality, echoes the second line of Isabella's paper and its play on the “no trespassing” sign. Isabella makes none of the changes to her introduction that she and Matthew discussed. She makes significant changes in the paragraphs about the Vietnam Memorial and in the conclusion. To round out her discussion of Pamela's disobedience at the Wall, and her sense that a five year old wouldn't know how to act at such a place, Isabella now adds a rhetorical question: “Pamela's mother could have easily warned her of the sacredness of space. But what would be the point of warning someone, whether their five or twenty-five, if they do not see the sacredness of the space?” Here Isabella poses a very interesting question that cuts to the heart of the concept of sacredness itself. She seems to suggest that in the case of places that are designated “sacred” by their very nature – places like churches, memorials, cemeteries, etc. – individuals have to be taught to treat them reverently. This line of logic supports her thesis: Pamela, at five years of age, did not feel particularly drawn to or in awe of the Vietnam Memorial. It did not hold any significance for her. Thus, it wasn't a place she considered sacred.

Isabella also added a conclusion. In a really smart move, she comes back to the “sign” motif beginning, “It is hard to designate a specific space for those who find sacredness in a space and marking it, “this sacred space reserved for.” This is not a great sentence, but that Isabella has learned to extend a motif throughout a paper is exciting. She did not possess this move as part of her repertoire when the semester began. Moreover, she ends her paper on a very strong note. Drawing on the idea that many ordinary spaces – beaches and libraries, for example – are sacred

to someone, she concludes, “many [...] cannot be held accountable if they do happen to trespass what some believe to be their sacred space.” Perhaps this could be more elegantly stated, but this conclusion, and this final sentence, represent a newfound courage to be bold.

The choices Isabella makes in her revision, too, are bold. She does not incorporate all the advice she was given as she was more prone to do early in the semester. Rather, she retains control of her paper, choosing its direction, adding sentences that clarify, and crafting a conclusion that compliments the argument she made. While seeking feedback from multiple sources may complicate the process of giving and receiving feedback, as this example illustrates, it can also empower a writer to take charge of her work in ways that receiving feedback from only one source cannot.

### **5.3 THE POTENTIAL OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES**

Multiple perspectives can muddy the revision waters. But in other cases, input from more than one voice can provide important information to students as they revise. For her final essay for Schmidt’s class, Michelle also composed a personal essay in response to the following prompt:

Essays by Pico Iyer, N. Scott Momaday, and Jonathan G.S. Koppell introduced us to categories of space with which most of us are familiar: transit space, sacred space, and cyberspace. Write an essay in which you create or designate an additional category of space, and reflect on its relevance and significance in your life. Let’s say, for example, that I want to explore what I call “waiting space.” Too much time in life, I suggest, is wasted in the process of waiting and particular places are designed just for that process. But because



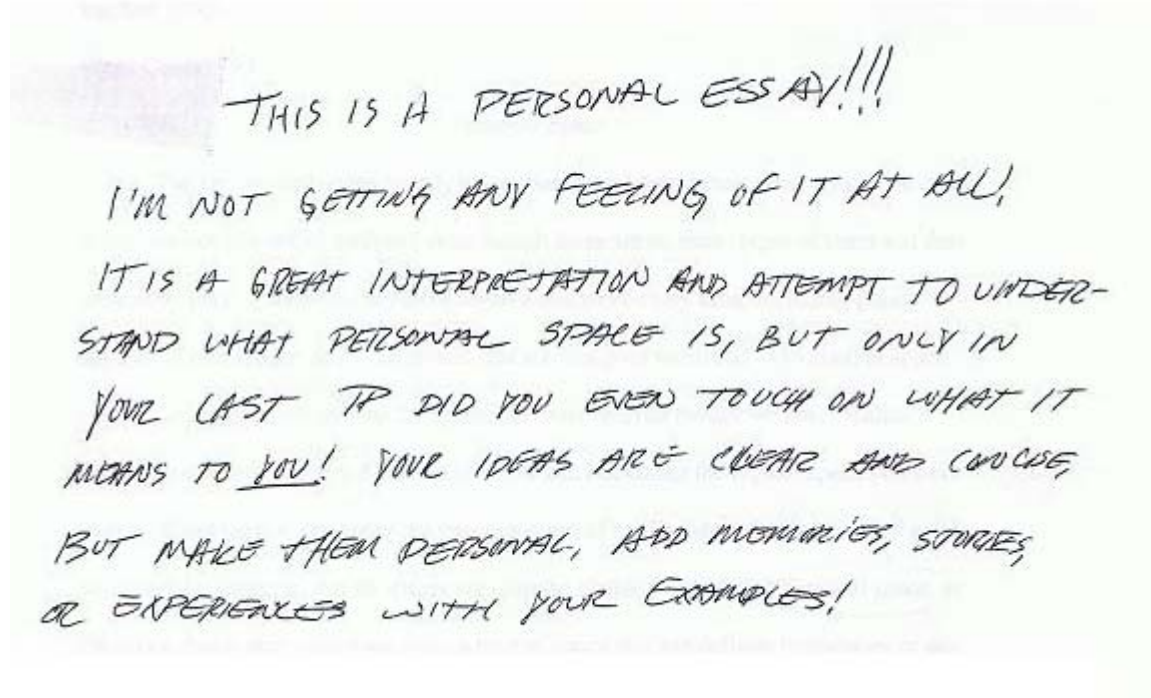
waiting challenges me in fundamental ways, I have tried to learn to cope with it by...etc., etc.

In the first draft of her essay, titled “Personal Space,” Michelle wrote about the space than an individual occupies and that can be invaded at almost any time. She claims “personal space” is an abstract concept because there are no fixed boundaries to it. In addition to its physical aspect, personal space, Michelle says, has an emotional component.

In the body paragraphs, Michelle describes the factors that influence how large our sphere of “personal space” must be. She says that, in general, Americans require more personal space than foreigners do. How we are raised, she claims, and our general confidence also influence the point at which we become uncomfortable – or feel violated – by the people around us.

In an interesting move, Michelle moves away from an individual’s personal space to suggest that countries, too, can have a “personal space.” She writes, “If America were to have a personal space, it was definitely violated when the twin towers crashed to the ground as a result of terrorist acts. Once America’s personal space was violated by those terrorists, we took extreme actions to get America back to its comfort zone and prevent another invasion: We went to war.” Although I find this a strange example and move, it is the only concrete example of a violation of personal space Michelle gives in her entire paper.

That this was Michelle’s only example raised a red flag to Thomas, the classroom peer who responded to her paper. Thomas wrote a direct, helpful note at the end of Michelle’s paper:



**Figure 6.** Thomas's Summary Comments on Michelle's Draft

I couldn't agree more. The most important part of this assignment – to try one's hand at writing a "personal essay" – is the inclusion of personal experiences to make the focus vivid and interesting and persuasive. But there is nothing personal about Michelle's essay. Perhaps this is what makes her example of the Twin Towers so confusing: why turn to a tangential example, one that is difficult to see as "personal" space, when there are surely truly personal examples Michelle could draw upon? After all, a high school psychology staple, "personal space" is hardly an original concept; Pamela also tackles the topic of "personal space." If two of the five students I worked with directly focused on this topic, how many of Schmidt's 27 other students chose this topic?

Thomas's was the best classroom peer critique I saw in the papers I collected, because while direct and critical, Thomas told Michelle exactly what she needed to hear – "I'm not getting any feeling of it at all!" – and imagined what the paper could be with more memories and stories. Prior to visiting the writing center, Michelle revised her draft extensively. Taking

Thomas's criticism to heart, Michelle's paper now opens with a vivid, personal description of a time and place when she felt her personal space was violated.

It was about five years ago in Cancun, Mexico that I first began to realize what personal space was. As I stepped on to the bus that had just come to a screeching halt in front of me and paid the driver my 10 *pesos*, I was in for a completely new experience. There were people standing shoulder-to-shoulder, front-to-back, and any other way imaginable. Before I could find anywhere to hang on, the driver zoomed off and I ended up in the lap of a Mexican woman who gave me quite a disapproving look. [...] I felt uncomfortable the second I stepped onto the bus. I had the urge to push everyone away from me because they were just too close. My personal space had been violated.

Although Michelle's topic is still somewhat clichéd, it is now a more vivid, more personal examination of what personal space means and, more importantly, the consequences of one's personal space being violated.

The body of the paper develops Michelle's ideas about why individuals require different "perimeters" around them. She claims that there are cultural (paragraph 3), familial (paragraph 4), social (paragraph 5), and circumstantial (paragraph 6) dimensions to how much space we require. The seventh paragraph still mentions the 9/11 terrorist attacks as an example of personal space as it applies to entities other than humans. Michelle's conclusion returns to the personal where she claims that her interest in personal experience stems from the fact that she is "an only child" who is "not used to sharing [her] things; and that includes [her] space." Her concluding statement is that her mood also affects her personal space: "If I'm in a good mood, chances are I won't mind being close to people, but if I'm in a bad mood, watch out. You don't want to be

anywhere near my personal space when I'm in a bad mood because I will let you know if you are too close." Here Michelle tries to incorporate advice that Schmidt has given throughout the term, that a conclusion can contain a new or surprising detail related to the topic at hand. In this case, the idea that mood affects personal space, particularly phrases like "watch out," seems slightly immature.

Michelle tried to participate actively in her final writing center session. However, her tutor, Ashley, a senior tutor with two years of experience, monopolized it, and hardly let Michelle get a word in edgewise. Michelle told Ashley she had some concerns, particularly about the "mood" paragraph and the one on the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Michelle did not tell Ashley that she has already rewritten the paper, but as Ashley's first comments after reading the paper highlighted, Ashley liked the new introduction: Michelle has hit the mark that Thomas asked her to aim for. Ashley commented, "I think it was good that you started out with this example, and it kind of – it led me into your idea well, because, you know, it's a very explicit example of how you felt, like, your personal space had been violated, and you felt, you know, that people were getting too close to you. So I think that that was a really good introduction." This example illustrates that if students view revision as an ongoing process, receiving feedback at more than one point in the process can help them feel more confident about their papers and the changes they make. It can also help them decide what changes to make next.

Later in the writing center session, another voice's – Schmidt's – entered the conversation. When Ashley moved to Michelle's 9/11 example she seemed unsure about its importance; Michelle agreed and they attempted to come up with an alternate conclusion.

*Ashley:* Yeah, at the end – I think what you were – I don't know. I just think that you were trying to –

- Michelle:* I just kind of wrote something down, cause I didn't know how to end it, so  
–
- Ashley:* It's okay.
- Michelle:* Do you think that I should, like, end it with kind of like my thoughts on my personal space, or should I, like – like, bring something else into it, cause [Schmidt] likes to have, like, a completely new idea, like, for the conclusion, and not just having it be a restatement of things.
- Ashley:* Right. Yeah, I do – I understand that. Let's see what she says here. Okay. "Write an essay in which you create or designate an additional category of space and reflect on its relevance and significance in your life." Okay, well, the example she gave us here might kind of provoke you. Okay, so she says "waiting space. Too much time in life, I suggest, is wasted in the process of waiting, and particular places are designed just for that process. But because waiting challenges me in fundamental ways, I try to learn to cope with it by et cetera." So I think maybe this last part is kind of what she wants you to get into at the end.

To help Michelle determine a direction for the conclusion, Ashley turned to Schmidt's assignment prompt. In this case, the prompt clearly suggested one possibility, that Michelle could consider how she has learned to "cope" with personal space. Ashley suggested that she could return to a scene from Mexico, "Or maybe, I don't know, you have a roommate at college," Ashley began. Sensing where she was going, Michelle expressed excitement:

- Michelle:* Mm hmm. That's a good idea.
- Ashley:* So maybe – cause you start out here by saying – yeah, I mean, I think that could be good, because you talk about you're an only child, and so you're used to not having to share anything, you know.
- Michelle:* Mm hmm.
- Ashley:* So, you know, maybe – I mean, this might be a bit of a stretch, but maybe, you know, learning more about personal space and exploring your own kind of idea of personal space. How did that affect you when you came to college, you know, because you have to share, you know, all of this space and – I don't know. I think that that could be interesting.
- Michelle:* Okay. Yeah, that's a good idea.

Drawing on the assignment prompt, essentially bringing Schmidt's own voice and sense of the assignment into the conversation, Ashley offered Michelle a direction for her conclusion that Michelle readily agreed would work. Toward the end of the session, Ashley reiterated the value of studying the assignment prompt: "You're writing is really great, but looking at her example reveals what your professor is looking for." According to it, Schmidt was most interested in the space's relevance or significance in the writer's life. Ashley encouraged Michelle to expand in these dimensions and showed her how the information that Michelle is an only child could be a launching point to show how Michelle adapted to living with a roommate.

In the final version of her paper, "My Bubble," Michelle cuts many of the paragraphs that focused on factors that influence how much personal space a person requires. Her final draft opens with the scene on the bus in Mexico; a few minor changes to wording were made. The first body paragraph defines more succinctly what Michelle means by personal space (a suggestion discussed with Ashley):

Personal space can be a hard concept to grasp because it does not just include the space your body takes up. It also includes the space around you in which no one else can come into without making you feel uncomfortable. For each person, this amount of space will be different. Usually, it's only when this space is violated that we become uncomfortably aware of it.

The paper's opening now pairs a personal example of the topic to be explored with a more distanced description of why exploring the idea of personal space is relevant and interesting.

In place of her discussion about how confidence and family upbringing influence personal space, Michelle reintroduces the idea of familial factors by adding to her paragraph about being an only child. Now this information leads into a discussion of how coming to college

has challenged her to widen her personal space: “At first, I required a little more personal space because I did not know her [...]. Now that I have gotten to know my roommate [...], it’s almost impossible for her to invade my personal space.” Although this version of the paper is far more succinct, and the example given in this paragraph returns to personal experience in ways that Michelle didn’t in previous drafts, it still lacks vivid examples of, for example, something that doesn’t bother Michelle now but that did earlier in the semester might have helped. Michelle could have written something like, “During the first week of school, Amber plopped down on my bed after class and wanted to talk about how Professor Thompson had asked her a question she couldn’t answer. I know Amber needed my sympathy, and I wanted to give it, but all I could think was, ‘Why is she sitting on my bed?’” She might have then paired this with a scene from more recently, after Thanksgiving break perhaps, when the both sit on Michelle’s bed gabbing about how strange it was go home after almost a semester away at college.

The placement of this paragraph – largely about Michelle’s evolving concept of personal space and how it can be modified – is strange. It comes about 2/3 of the way through the paper and could lead nicely into a concluding statement about how the example of her roommate shows another one of the complex dimensions of personal space: that it’s not static. But Michelle follows her roommate paragraph with new paragraphs about how personal space is affected by gender and about the repercussions of violating someone’s personal space. The organization here is fairly peculiar and not particularly effective. The new conclusion is similarly weak. In it, Michelle abandons Schmidt’s advice to introduce something new or surprising in the conclusion and returns to “summary mode”: “The boundaries of an individual’s personal space are a direct result of the way each person is raised, where they are from, and what experiences they have had throughout their life.” This sentence echoes the kind of three-pronged thesis that opens so many

papers during the first weeks of class. Michelle concludes the paper with a cry for understanding and respect – “Because personal space is something that makes each individual different from everyone else, it should be appreciated and celebrated” – again a hold over from a more simplistic form of essay.

This paper clearly challenged Michelle and probably many of her classmates. The personal essay was not a form they practiced during the semester and so concluding with it seems a little strange, perhaps. It’s not a form that allowed them to showcase what they had learned. On the other hand, because the reading list for the course was composed almost entirely of “personal essays,” it’s also true that Michelle had many models from which to draw.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSIONS**

The examples in this chapter suggest that the amount of feedback and the source of that feedback do not necessarily impact the degree of revision. Although Pamela met with her professor who, apparently, pointed out serious weaknesses in the paper, she hardly revised her paper. Michelle, on the other hand, received feedback from a classroom peer and from a writing center tutor and altered her paper significantly after she received feedback from each of them. I wonder if Pamela’s revision stalled after her meeting with Schmidt because she did not know how to go about revising in the manner suggested. Perhaps she feared that if she completely altered her thesis statement, she would make the paper worse, not better. What if she had taken the draft she worked on with Schmidt to the writing center? Could a tutor have helped her make the changes Schmidt encouraged her to make? Or, would a tutor in that situation have faced the same resistance Matthew felt when he worked with Isabella?



As I contemplate these questions, I am reminded of a comment made by a fellow classmate in a graduate seminar, “Teaching Writing,” that I enrolled in mid-way through graduate school. Almost all the other students in the class were enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching program offered in the Department of Instruction and Learning. As we discussed peer response strategies, one of my classmates suggested that if students respond to one another’s drafts, teachers should not respond to those same drafts. At the time, I remember thinking “that’s crazy!” I, too, thought “the more feedback, the better.” But now that I consider these examples, I see my classmate’s point: if given feedback from a teacher and a peer tutor, a student will usually value the teacher’s feedback over the tutor’s because teachers have more authority than tutors. (I say usually because I can easily imagine a case in which teachers who are not as generous as Schmidt and Davis could offer condescending and unhelpful criticism.) One of the values of collaboration championed by Kail and Trimbur in “The Politics of Peer Tutoring” is what they call a “crisis of authority.” They argue that in various collaborative learning environments, writing centers among them, students are asked “to rely on themselves, to learn on their own in the absence of faculty authority figures” (207). What my classmate suggested in her comment was exactly this: if teachers want to encourage students to collaborate with one another and to value that collaboration, teachers should not undermine the value of peer feedback by interjecting their own. Encourage students to depend on themselves, she seemed to say; don’t foster dependence on teachers.

In all the cases in which students consulted with a tutor and a teacher – Max and his golfing paper, Pamela and her paper about Dorothy Allison’s essay, and Isabella and her essay about sacred spaces – students remained dependent upon faculty members. Drawing on arguments made by Kail and Trimbur, Dave Healy claims that such dependence upon teachers’

authority “can breed student passivity” (180). Passivity is most prevalent in Max’s case. Despite all that talk, all those new ideas he and James brainstormed, upon receiving word from Davis that he didn’t really need an argument, Max took the easier, more passive route: he filled six pages with what he intended to fill them. Even Isabella showed passivity in her final writing center session; she claimed time and again that she didn’t want to bother working on things her teacher hadn’t mentioned.

But before I start to sound as though I am arguing that students should only conference with their teachers (or only with writing center tutors), let me pause. All three of these writers visited the writing center at least four times during the semester and all four thought the tutoring they received there was helpful; all claimed they intended to use the writing center in the future. After her conference with Schmidt on her first paper, Pamela relied only on writing center tutors. Though she did not say so explicitly, it seems to me that her confidence *was* shaken when she met with Schmidt and she instead came to rely on the authority of classroom peers and of peer tutors.

In the final interview he had with me, Max told me he definitely planned to use the writing center for future classes, but that he thought the nature of the assignments in Davis’s class made it difficult for tutors to be effective. “A lot of our papers were open-ended,” he told me. “The tutors didn’t understand the assignments so that wasn’t very helpful.” And Isabella, also a frequent user, claimed that her resistance to Matthew’s feedback was particular to that assignment. Because it was a personal essay, she said, “it felt that whatever I wrote was supposed to be there.” The opposition these students felt toward their tutors in the writing center were not only exceptions to the overall pattern of the 33 sessions in the whole study, but also exceptions to the tutoring sessions in which each student participated.

More typical were scenarios like Michelle's. Michelle received feedback from a classroom peer and a peer tutor. She gleaned valuable information from both meetings and revised her paper with her readers' comments in mind. Many other "data points" illustrate this pattern, but perhaps none reveal the potential of multiple voices as well as those that contributed to Kiki's final portfolio project. Taking into account the three smaller assignments and the final portfolio, Kiki received feedback from no fewer than five tutors – plus Davis – as she drafted and revised this project. It should go without saying that six different voices would have different ideas to contribute to this project. As I discussed in Chapter 4, I think Kiki attributed so much authority to Joshua's feedback that she completely made-over a paper that was more interesting than its revision. With a compilation assignment like the Portfolio Project, the temptation is to simply jam segments of previous writing together. Kiki resists this temptation and in the final draft she finally puts onto paper what I could sense she wanted to say throughout the semester.

Kiki's final project integrates previously drafted portions with new writing so that this paper is actually not about what distinguishes women from one another in the two cultures (which is what Davis encouraged her to focus on), but is instead about Kiki's complex relationship with the women she has known and loved in both places. It is an exploration of herself and what she has drawn from both of the cultures in which she has lived.

The opening of the revised portfolio is composed of entirely new material. Kiki begins with her birth and the significance of her name. Her mother asks her throughout her life, "Who is Kiki?" "Why are you Kiki?" "What makes you Kiki?" These questions frame the new paper. Into this new framework, Kiki inserts many of the stories, vignettes, and descriptions that she drafted previously. But more than simply inserting parts from different papers, Kiki weaves

sections of them together. For example, amid her narrative about the Shinto festival that she crafted for Parts Two and Three, Kiki inserts a description of her mother's eyes from Part One:

The festival is not only for two days, but it includes a whole year of preparations and prayers. I used to want to be reborn in a boy so I could be in the crowd of honorable men in the festival, but now I wish to be a woman like my mother someday, because I see the virtue of being female through my mother's life. My mother's smile speaks itself what a great tranquility that she has within her heart; she gets it from years and years of experiences; bitterness, joy, struggle, pain, and rejoice. The crow's feet around her eyes symbolize her eventful life, and a tender personality is displayed in her eyes. As she got older, her smile has become more natural.

Throughout the paper, Kiki makes interesting transitions like this one, moving smoothly from the festival itself, to her desire as a young child to be a boy so she could participate in the festival, to her understanding as she grew up of the important, if not public, role that women play in a family's life and in a community's life.

Kiki's transitions are not always elegant, but they are interesting. She moves out of the Japanese Shinto festival description and into other experiences by stating, "I've become a Christian four years ago, so I do not celebrate the Shinto festival." The information about her religious conversion comes seemingly out of nowhere, but it becomes an important theme later in the paper. Although the transition is somewhat jarring, it does allow her to move away from the Shinto festival and into other details about her childhood including that her mother expressed love for Kiki by making *obento* lunch boxes.

From there, Kiki moves to her American family and the ways that they showed their love and affection for her, namely through hugs and words to that effect. Much of this material is drawn from earlier drafts about Thanksgiving in America. This time, the fact that Kelly and Tom, her host parents, kiss publicly does not illustrate that Kelly has retained her sense of herself as a “woman” but instead serves as an example of the ways that Americans openly show and tell one another how they feel. In a new passage, Kiki writes, “After I came to America, I learned to say what I feel instead of holding my feelings back. If I love someone, I now tell them that I love them without any hesitations because I may die tomorrow, and I want people around me to know and feel that I love them.” Though Kiki’s words seem a little dramatic, knowing her allows me to see them as genuine. She admits that “this is not very Japanese traditional ways of thinking, but it is my way of life that I have adapted from American culture.” This paper has become Kiki’s way of grappling with her two identities: Japanese girl, American woman.

That Kiki focuses on the two cultures in which she has grown up clearly indicates that she feels torn, to some degree, between her past and her present. But while there is a tension between these two cultures, Kiki tells a new story that suggests she is closer to reconciling the differences between the cultures than it may have first appeared. She told her tutor Natalie this story during their writing center session and Natalie agreed that it perfectly illustrates the presence of traditions and behaviors from both cultures within Kiki.

The story begins with Kiki making a meal for a group of friends as they said goodbye to one of them. As she prepares the meal, Kiki thinks both of her mother who she watched prepare such meals, and thinks ahead to what she can add to an *obento* box for her friend’s journey the next day. As she finishes preparing the box, she remembers to add a note-card like the one Kelly, her host mother, “would always put” in the lunch boxes “to tell someone how much she cares

about them.” In the context of the whole paper, we are meant to see how Kiki’s actions are drawn from both her cultures, the one that shows people they are dear through nice gestures and the one that shows people they care more overtly through words.

In a paragraph that could easily have served as a conclusion to her paper, Kiki summarizes, “In Japan, it is rare to say I love you.” But Kiki has already revealed that she has now adopted the American custom of telling others how she feels. Still, she asserts “I am not Americanized. I do not like the word ‘Americanized,’ because I adapted American customs by making choices, and I have not forgotten Japanese spirit.” The distinction that Kiki is trying to make is a tense one, especially given her conversion to Christianity which, it seems, occurred on the heels of her entrance into a Lutheran high school and being welcomed into the homes of several host families from the church with which it is associated. (To what extent did Kiki *choose* Christianity?) The final few pages of the paper delve into Kiki’s identity as a Christian which, it seems, we are to understand is now her primary identity: “There are many things, title that would describe me and my life, but always the bottom line, I will be a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, and that is all I want people to remember of me when I die.”

This ending, which is completely new to the final draft (none of the others dealt with or even mentioned Kiki’s Christian identity) is heartfelt and sincere. But it is also confusing in the scope of the entire portfolio. If Kiki has taken on the primary identity “Christian,” she is clearly grappling with more than what it means to be a Japanese woman living in America. In addition to this problem, she is also dealing with the difficulty associated with rejecting the belief system of her parents and her culture. This is heavy, hard stuff for an eighteen year old to consider so it is no surprise that Kiki turns to these questions and issues in her final portfolio. Although the

final few pages seemingly veer off topic (to Kiki's Christian identity), in another light, these final pages are, for Kiki, the meat of the topic.

Multiple voices are intrinsically part of writing centers and other forms of collaboration. As the examples in this chapter suggest, some students struggle to productively negotiate those multiple, sometimes conflicting voices. In the final portfolio, Kiki seems to effectively deal with the many voices – Hilary's, Jenna's, Joshua's, Natalie's, James's, Davis's – that contributed to various portions of this project. In fact, it is Kiki's voice that speaks most strongly in the final version. Kiki visited the writing center twice as she considered how to craft her final draft, but she never mentioned any of the new content about her Christian identity. Despite all the feedback from readers, then, Kiki steps away from it and makes her own choices about what she ultimately wants the Portfolio Project to say about her. Amid the chaos of multiple, sometimes conflicting voices, Kiki identifies her own purpose, draws her own conclusions and revises her paper with primarily her own agenda in mind. Thus, though multiple voices and multiple sources of feedback can muddy the waters, can confuse and overwhelm writers, it is amid these voices that the writer's own voice sometimes emerges the most clearly and confidently. Even given the problems with multiple voices, the potential for truly autonomous revision is greatest here.

Writing centers, particularly those staffed by peer tutors, will always find themselves precariously positioned between student writers who question their own authority to speak in the academy and their teachers who have the authority to certify and grade the students' writing as proficient. At centers like DePauw's, students are trained to begin a tutorial by attempting to understand what students are being asked to do and to conclude a session by reminding students to seek out teacher's feedback. In other words, the peer tutors at DePauw's writing center are always inherently aware of and make students aware of their own status. Still, tutors are invested

with some authority. They have been chosen to be tutors, they are trained to respond to student work, and they are employed by the university to do that work.

How, then, might peer tutors make their voices relevant? How might the perspectives that James, Rebecca, and Matthew offered to Max, Pamela, and Isabella, respectively, become productive even as they seem to conflict with the perspectives offered by the students' instructors?

There isn't an easy answer to this question, and what I am about to propose seems reductive even to me. My analysis of the three sessions after which students make few revisions contrasts in one very important way with my analysis of the collaborations after which students make substantial revisions. The students who are more prone to make substantial revision usually had notes or other writing from which to work. After Michelle collaborated in class with Thomas, Michelle significantly revised her paper by adding an introduction about a real experience she had in Mexico. Because Thomas gave her such a clear, handwritten direction – “include a personal memory!” – Michelle's first revision was striking. Similarly, Kiki was empowered to rework her entire portfolio because she had three papers on her general topic already written. Even Isabella's first revision of her “sacred space” paper included the revised thesis statement Schmidt wrote on the top of her paper. This shape-giving statement seemed to help Isabella make further decisions about content and organization. In these three cases, students left collaborative sessions of various kinds with some writing already done: they had a tangible place from which to begin their revisions.

On the other hand, during many of the other sessions I observed, and particularly in the tutorials that dealt Max's golf paper, with Pamela's analysis of Allison's essay, and with Isabella's sacred space paper, the students and tutors composed little to nothing together, a few



stray notes at most. Thus, when students left their tutorials, they had memories of conversations about their writing, but no record of the session, no writing from which to begin their revisions. Tutoring theory suggests that tutors should take a non-directive, minimalist approach. In an article on this subject, Jeff Brooks warns tutors, “don’t let yourself have a pencil in your hand” (172). But I question this mandate. What if James had asked Max to write down some of the counter-arguments they had brainstormed or had spent time during the session writing a more argumentative thesis statement? If Max had left the session equipped with sentences, would he have been more willing to revise his paper?

Similarly, Rebecca had some useful feedback about Pamela’s paper, namely that she needed to more fully explain what she meant by “stereotypes” and “typecasts.” What if they had spent some time discussing what Pamela meant and Rebecca had scribed the ideas so that Pamela, too, would have more to work with when she began revising? It is possible that if they had done actual writing during the session, Pamela would have felt like the tutor “knew what she was doing” even after Schmidt criticized her thesis statement.

I certainly cannot claim that if the students and tutors in these sessions had written something together the revisions would have been more substantial and that the tutors’ voices would have seemed more authoritative to the students. However, having material – jotted notes, sentence fragments, a fully reworked paragraph, even a new outline – with which to work can facilitate revision and can be a productive way for students negotiate among competing expectations. One of a writing center’s functions is to allow students the time to work on their writing with an “experienced” student writer, time that instructors do not always have (Brooks 170). A productive use of that tutorial time, especially when students have already received other feedback, is for tutors to illicit from students what they want to convey in their writing and then

spend time helping the student compose. A peer tutor's authority might not be derived as much from their evaluations of others' writing as it is from their abilities to help students accomplish what their instructors, classroom peers, and they themselves want to accomplish.

## 6.0 AS IF THROUGH ANOTHER'S EYES

This dissertation is largely about “revision” and the ways that students practice revision, particularly after a tutorial in the writing center or other consultation with readers. Nancy Sommers and Linda Flower – as well as others who theorized revision in the 1970s and 1980s – suggest that when writing is “revised” (Sommers) or “transformed” (Flower) it changes from primarily “writer-based” prose to more “reader-based” prose. “Good writing,” writes Flower, “is often the cognitively demanding transformation of the natural but private expressions of Writer-Based thought into a structure and style adapted to a reader” (20). Flower’s understanding of the “reader” likens the reader to a consumer. In so doing, she sets writers up as the “producers,” as those who must conform their writing/products to the expectations, needs, and even whims of the readers/consumers in order to earn high marks from them. According to these models, writing becomes “better” when it is revised with readers’ needs in mind.

Collaborative pedagogical tools – including writing center tutorials, peer response activities, and conferences with teachers – all reflect the sense that student writing improves when readers influence that writing. However, my understanding of the evidence that the case studies presented here provide calls into question both the writer- vs. reader-based dichotomy and the implication that “moving from writer-based to reader-based” is necessarily to move “from ill-suited to well-suited prose” (Welch, *Getting Restless* 1).

Part of my dissertation's title – “As If Through Another's Eyes” – plays with the idea that revision is perhaps best thought of as both writer- and reader-based. “Through Another's Eyes” points to what I think are important collaborations with another individual, with another person's perspective. But with the words “As if,” I also mean to imply that in the most effective revisions, whatever a writer learns through collaboration with another is ultimately considered through that writer's own perspective and mind.

As a composition teacher who frequently conferences with students about their drafts in progress, I know that when I read students' final papers, I look for substantive revisions and feel disappointed when I do not find them. I know I am not the only teacher who feels this way. On the other hand, I feel satisfied when I read a final paper that is more thoughtful, daring, or sophisticated than its draft. Students, I think, must constantly challenge themselves to try to complicate their writing and thinking and when I see evidence that they have so challenged themselves, I often have a deep sense of satisfaction about the student's attempt. Even though I did not teach the seven students in this study, I found myself similarly eager to read their revised drafts with the hope that in them I would find some evidence of writerly growth.

Of the tutorials and student papers I discussed in the previous chapters, I find that the most satisfying processes to study and revisions to read are those that exhibit both the writers' attention to what others' have contributed and what the writers themselves most want to convey through their writing. Examples of such work are Ken's internal monologue, Kiki's description of her mother and her final portfolio project, and Isabella's development from a writer who accepted a tutor's authority almost unconditionally in the beginning of the semester but resisted it by the end.

Conversely, the revisions that show the least change and that are fairly unsatisfying to read often result from sessions in which the tutor – and not the student – has directed the session. The tutorial in which James and Max discussed Max’s paper about stereotypes in golf, for example, held great promise. But because James (the tutor) directed the session and spent much time trying to convince Max to focus on the issues facing women and golf, a direction Max clearly did not want to take, Max reflected on the session with hostility and ultimately disregarded nearly all of the good work done in the tutorial.

Similarly, many of Pamela’s final drafts showed little difference from her initial drafts. Perhaps Pamela is among the students who do not distinguish between revising for content and editing for errors, but I also think she resisted revision because she often disagreed with the assessments others gave of her work. In her paper about Dorothy Allison’s essay (discussed in Chapter 5), for example, Pamela’s final draft changed very little, perhaps owing to the fact that too many readers – a classroom peer, a writing center tutor, and a teacher – contributed unwelcome feedback without offering or recording concrete suggestions to address the concerns raised. Moreover, Pamela’s sense that Schmidt “re-did [her] whole thesis,” while Pamela herself had little voice in the process, may have contributed to the small degree to which the paper was revised. Time and again, students expressed that they wanted tutors to help them convey what they were thinking in their writing. During her first tutorial, Pamela told Rebecca, she had trouble “getting across the point” and with “assuming that the reader is going to know what I’m talking about.” Similarly, Max told James, “I’d kinda like thought that I had like some good ideas but I’m having trouble like tying them together.” What writers ultimately want from collaboration is not just a reader’s voice in their heads “whose existence and whose expectations

influence their revision process” (Sommers 385), but ultimately a collaborator who will help them find a way to control their words so that their intentions are conveyed.

Of course, there are exceptions to this observation. As I noted in Chapter 5, Kiki’s paper about the meals prepared by mothers in Japan and mothers in America was the most radically revised paper in the whole study; but Joshua was also very directive during the writing center tutorial. Despite exceptions like Kiki’s substantial revision, I would argue, based on my study of this data, that the revisions that most improved the papers the students in this sample wrote were informed both by *curious* readers and reflective writers.

In many cases, tutors forgot to be curious, but one outstanding example of a curious tutor/reflective writer interaction came in a session between Kiki and Jenna about Kiki’s second portfolio which compared Japanese and American women. During this session, Jenna asked genuine questions, including this one about a comparison Kiki had made:

*Jenna:* Okay, so, I have a question. “What is unique about this particular festival is that women death are considered to be as bad luck, so people who had a recent death in their family this year would be automatically taken out of that festival.” I don’t understand the connection between women and death.

*Kiki:* Oh, yeah. Woman are considered as bad luck, and any kind of death are also bad luck.

*Jenna:* Oh, okay.

[...]

*Kiki:* Like, a family who have death cannot be in the festival, and woman still can be a part of it to support man but cannot touch the ark or cannot be really close to the holy stuff.

*Jenna:* Yeah. No, that makes sense because they’re considered bad luck. Okay, so I get what you’re saying now is that “just like the people whose family members have died can’t participate, women also cannot because they’re bad luck.”

*Kiki:* (*excitedly*) Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jenna read a sentence from Kiki's paper aloud because she was genuinely unsure what Kiki was trying to convey. Thus, Jenna asked Kiki to clarify not only what she had written but in some ways to educate Jenna about a cultural custom that she did not understand. Jenna's curiosity and the linguistic frame she offered Kiki as a result led Kiki to literally grab her paper and start writing. In her revised paper, Kiki explains, "Just like a family that has had a recent death is not allowed to participate in the festival, also any women are considered as a bad luck therefore women are not allow to touch the arks or participate in the festival." This is not a polished sentence, but it does better convey the relationship between families who have experienced death and women.

Jenna's curiosity about Kiki's subject matter also meant that Jenna asked Kiki questions about things she had studied in class called "Food and Culture" the previous year. Because Kiki's assignment required her to draw on outside research – something she had not really done in the draft – Jenna reflected that in that food and culture class, she had studied, "*obento* boxes (is that how you say it?) – like the lunch boxes. And we talked about how hard Japanese moms worked on preparing those boxes and how much pride they took in them." Kiki agreed, "You know that's interesting. I have information about it. Maybe including that could be interesting." The exchange about these lunch boxes was brief, but Jenna's curiosity and reflection on something she had learned previously illustrated to Kiki that she was, in fact, engaged in her topic and so curious about it that she could make connections to other things she had studied. Kiki added the following paragraph to the final draft of this paper:

One of the humble ways of Japanese mothers showing their great love for their families is displayed in the process of making lunch boxes. In the book, Permitted and Prohibited Desires Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan, the lunch box,

*obento*, is described as “a representation of what the mother is” (Allison, 90). “Women spend what seems to be an inordinate amount of time on the production of this one item” (Allison, 91) to show how much they care about their families. They find their satisfactions from seeing their children or husbands coming home with empty lunch boxes to insure that their love has been delivered to the families.

In Kiki’s paper, this example of the *obento* box as a Japanese mother’s sign of affection for her family members stands in contrast to the hugs American mothers tend to bestow on their children. While it is hard to measure a student’s reflection, I think this example suggests that Kiki reflected about how to and where best in her essay to incorporate this example. Jenna’s curiosity helped Kiki add more “research” (another citation, really) to her paper, but Kiki reflected on the placement of this specific, striking example about a particular cultural difference.

## 6.1 SURPRISING LESSONS FROM THE CENTER

I have been asked what surprised me most about the data I collected for this dissertation. Faced with the data I collected, I began watching tapes, reading papers, and reflecting on interviews “looking both for patterns – events which seem to recur in some sort of connected way – and for explanations of them, ways in which such patterns seem to make sense” (North, “The Ethnographers” 303). I suppose that in looking for patterns, I was not thinking about the data as surprising or unsurprising, and so this question about what surprised me required me to think



about the students, tutors, tutorials, and papers from a distance, from a perspective I was not used to considering.

To begin, I was surprised by the generosity of the students, tutors, and instructors who participated in my research. I am impressed by how hard-working and reflective the students and tutors were. Their willingness to allow me to videotape their tutorials astounded me. Every tutor consented to participate, even with their very first tutorial. The teachers – neither of whom is tenured – greeted my presence in their classes as an opportunity to help me and to learn something about their own teaching.

In addition, when I started my study, my working hypothesis was that the students most likely to make substantial revisions to their work would be the most well-prepared students, the students whose facility with language and the disciplinary expectations of school English allows them to find words and to reshape them. Thus, I was surprised to find the opposite, that Isabella and Kiki – the two students whose first language was not English – were the students who revised their writing the most, who were most willing to abandon what they had written and to start over again. Upon reflection, I see that I should not have been that surprised. Although this framework can only begin to address the factors that contributed to Kiki's and Isabella's revisions, it is likely that their social status as "outsiders" to the American university – Kiki because she's Japanese and Isabella because she's a first-generation college student – contributed to their apparent willingness to accept the authority of teachers and tutors who asked them to revise and guided them through the process of revision.

What surprised me more about the tutorials and students' revisions is how nervous both tutors and first-year students seemed to be when it came to taking risks. And let me be clear: I think that to revise is to take risks. Every time students in my sample went to the writing center

or shared a draft with classroom peers, they risked facing criticism. And even when that criticism was more or less constructive and directed at helping students improve their texts, by facing – asking for, really – that criticism, students risked self-esteem, they risked confronting that someone doesn't think their writing is “up to snuff,” and they risked having to start all over. Moreover, as soon as students begin making changes to their writing, they risk that their writing may not improve as a result of that effort.

So maybe it shouldn't have surprised me that students and tutors alike sometimes resisted taking the risks revision requires. For the most part, when students brought papers to the writing center, they and their tutors approached the tutorial as an opportunity to determine *if* the students needed to revise their papers and, if so, where the students' efforts in revision should be focused. When Rebecca tutored Pamela, when Matthew tutored Isabella, and in many of the sessions I taped but did not feature here, the tutors focused on the texts students had written and on how to improve them. Suggestions like Matthew's “you don't have to say ‘to me’...The professor is gonna assume it's your opinion, so you normally don't even have to say that” or like Rebecca's primary emphasis on orienting the reader to Dorothy Allison's background, exemplify how tutors often attempt to identify papers' weaknesses and then arrive at strategies for improving those weaknesses. But such work, as most theorists of revision would agree, while important, only scratches the surface of what revision can be.

Rather than asking whether a text needs to be revised, tutorials should be occasions during which students and tutors grapple with what more the student's text can do, with the possibilities for revision that the draft itself presents. There are many ways this might happen: tutors can help students imagine more ambitious arguments, fuller analysis, richer transitions, and so on. In *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, Nancy Welch

suggests another way of thinking about the purpose of collaboration, namely that it be used to “discover not *whether* a student needs to revise [...], but to discover instead where and how, in or around this writing, he or she *has already started* to revise” (168). This can happen, she suggests, if students, tutors, and teachers explore the moments of dissonance in students’ writing, the moments when texts are too unified, too uniform, and too polite (30). I find this argument compelling. And while it did not happen in every session, there were tutorials in which tutors helped students identify moments where they had “already started to revise.” For example, when James first tutored Michelle and her paper about Anne Sexton’s poem (see Chapter 3), he identified a few sentences – “In the poem ‘Self in 1958,’ she begins with an extremely powerful and thought-provoking question. She asks, ‘What is reality?’ (Line 1). I honestly don’t think that Sexton knows herself” – as a dissonant ones. Recall that of these sentences James asked, “you sort of talk about how Sexton addresses the question, and you say you ‘honestly don’t think that Sexton knows herself.’ [...] Is one the more, you know, true part of herself...?” In this moment, I think, James does identify a place where Michelle’s own words reveal that she is in the process of rethinking, of reconsidering, of grappling with the poem’s tensions: she has already begun to revise.

James similarly attempted to engage Max in unpacking dissonant moments when tutored Max’s problematic golf stereotype paper. In this tutorial, James noted several places where Max’s words seemed contradictory. Max had quoted Vijay Singh saying that he hoped Michelle Wie wouldn’t make the cut to play a PGA tour event because “she doesn’t belong here.” Max wrote, “Wie, playing on the men’s golf tour, may be one of the most important events for women in golf. It shows that the game is no longer only for men and women can compete along side of them as equally, regardless of what some people, such as Singh have to say.” Max’s point was

made in service of his argument that stereotypes in golf are changing. But interestingly, by quoting Singh, Max seemed to uphold a stereotype of golf: that men and women shouldn't play on the same tour. James asked, "here you're talking about women being the equal of men in golf. Do you believe that or is that...?" Max's answer pointed directly to a major tension in his paper: "Yeah, they should be equal but not play on the same tour." This is a prime moment of dissonance, a moment when a student has to confront a seeming contradiction. It is a moment that James worked with by asking questions that required Max to muddy his thinking. Max agreed with James's idea that Wie playing on the men's tour could be inspirational to young women but doesn't know how to respond to it because, "that's like 100 percent against my argument." In this case, James was unable to persuade Max that some of the words he has written were dissonant, were moments that beg for revision. Still, the student/tutor situation allowed these latent contradictions to emerge through conversation, and this is very important work. Max told me that he wrote exclusively five paragraph themes in high school. Generally, these themes encourage students to reduce issues to tight, contradiction-free sound bites: no need to engage with other perspectives. This conversation – which required Max to confront and encouraged him to engage with another's perspective – might have been a critical first step in Max's development as a writer and thinker.

As Max's tutorial indicates, students do not always embrace the moments of tension in their papers as opportunities for revision. Nor do tutors. They sometimes retreat from these moments even after they have identified them. This was the case in perhaps the most memorable session of the semester in which Joshua was on the verge of drawing Ken into a rich, uncomfortable discussion that was hidden among the words Ken had composed.

After students in Gary Davis's class read several of Michel de Montaigne's essays, they were given the following assignment:

Essay on Manners and Mores

Following Montaigne's example, identify a contemporary manner or more, some common value or behavior we take for granted, and interrogate its origin, purpose, or logic through a subjective but well reasoned essay. You do not need to assume a controversial position, as Montaigne does in many of his essays, nor do you need to confront a particularly grave issue such as war, race, or gender. You should simply introduce an unconventional idea about a conventional subject, prompting your reader to think about some commonplace fact or belief in a new way.

Ken, who I introduced in Chapter 2 as a student who wrote fairly provocative papers, chose as his taboo subject the "male thong." Ken claimed that this topic counts as taboo because "when you say, you know, 'Hey, I think I'll go buy a male thong,' [the response] isn't, 'That'd be really tight' ... It's more like, 'What? That's gross!'"

Ken's paper is certainly creative, opening with a beach scene and a speaker admiring a shapely body wearing a thong. As the figure turns over, the speaker realizes it is a man, not a woman, wearing the thong. Readers, it seems, are meant to be shocked. In the body of the paper, Ken raises the questions that will be central to his exploration about our attitudes regarding male thongs: "Why is something that is commonly accepted, and in some cases preferred, for females, so disliked when the opposite sex wears them?" He suggests that readers ought to reconsider their distaste for the male thong because "there has to be some practicality to wearing [a thong]" for women and that "they are supposedly more comfortable."

The session featured several interesting – and awkward – exchanges including this one which was interrupted by a tutor at another table who overheard this rather odd conversation:

*Joshua:* Let's see. Are thongs –? Are thongs, in fact, more comfortable for women?

*Ken:* See, I don't know. I know that some girls just wear them for comfort, but –

*Joshua:* See, I always thought it was the fact that since it's – since the butt cheeks are out, it doesn't leave a panty line that you can see if you're wearing tight pants. I thought that was –

*Male Tutor:* [Inaudible]

*Joshua:* He's got an essay on thongs and why it's acceptable for women to wear them and not men.

As this dialogue indicates, the paper presented the tutor with a fairly awkward situation. He began the session by asking a question that was meant to complicate Ken's under-analyzed assertion that thongs are “supposedly more comfortable.” Although Ken and Joshua were interrupted by another tutor and ultimately did not return to the conversation about the relative comfort of a thong versus other types of underwear, Joshua did attempt to point Ken to a moment of dissonance in his text where the word “supposedly” points to the need for further analysis.

I cannot say where this conversation would have gone if the other tutor had not interrupted, but the conversation reveals how uncomfortable it can be for a tutor to point out the dissonant, unsubstantiated moments in a student's text. It is harder still, it seems, to engage students in a meaningful conversation about those dissonant moments.

In a paper Joshua gave at the 2008 Conference on College Composition and Communication about this session, he reflected about what he might have done differently. He claims he should have remained focused on “the ultimate question of why thongs are acceptable for women but not for men.” Joshua also reminded us that this was a paper about “underwear –

not war, not abortion, not any number of more substantive controversies.” But just as it is difficult to ask hard questions of students whose papers deal with politically charged topics (and this paper did, in fact, deal with issues of gender and the cultural construction of gender), it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint and ask the question that is truly the important one.

Later in the session, when they discussed the following anecdote, Joshua and Ken arrived back at the question of the gendered implications of thong underwear:

One day my Aunt Sally and her daughter Jan were out shopping. My cousin Jan was only seven or eight at the time, but she had been influenced enough by our society to make this statement. While in the girls section of Jan’s favorite clothing store, looking at a thong asked, “Mom, I want some of these big girl underwear.” Even at this young age Jan thought that this underwear was the norm for young women. More than just a device for sex appeal, there has to be some practicality to wearing such a device.

Ken used Jan’s sense that thongs are for “big girls” to suggest that part of the reason men shun thongs is that both girls and men associate thongs with “womanhood.” The problem is that Ken simultaneously tries to argue that the girl’s desire for thong underwear had nothing to do with sexuality: “As my cousin Jan noticed all these ‘big girls’ wear thong’s and this is at a state in her life where she really doesn’t fully comprehend sexual ideas, so to her wearing a thong means being mature and becoming a woman.” The logic does not quite work here because, after all, biologically, “becoming a woman” has everything to do with reproduction and sex. Ken wanted to separate the two – “becoming a woman” and sexuality – but Joshua questioned whether it is possible to do so.

*Joshua:* So, wait. You’re kinda going back and forth here a little bit because you’re saying that [thongs are] becoming a symbol of womanhood, but

then when you say your cousin doesn't think about sexual stuff, it makes it sound like it's only a symbol of womanhood to young people.

*Ken:* Well, I was just trying to say that she sees this as like being a symbol of womanhood without just like sex appeal to men.

*Joshua:* I see.

*Ken:* You know what I'm sayin'? Because she's not interested in showing it off to some guy friend of hers.

*Joshua:* Then, do you think that holds as women get older? Or do you think there's something about womanhood that's sort of tied up in sexuality? Questions to consider. (*Laughter*)

Here Joshua asked Ken a question that drives to the heart of the assignment which requires him to prompt readers "to think about some commonplace fact or belief in a new way." In his one and a half page draft, Ken had not prompted readers to think about the male thong in a new way. If Ken really considered the questions Joshua asked (and implied) – Why does Jan associate thong underwear with "big girls"?; Is "becoming a woman" inherently sexual?; Is the distaste Ken perceives other have of male thongs wrapped up in the association of thongs with female sexuality? – he could transform this paper into something more than borderline juvenile locker-room humor.

But even though Ken admitted, "That is a good point. That is a good point that I did not think about," both Ken and Joshua began to laugh and the conversation quickly moved away from these difficult, uncomfortable questions to questions about audience. Both men seemed uneasy with the restlessness – to use Welch's word – of the contradiction that Ken's paper presented, but neither student nor tutor was willing to wrestle with this restlessness in that moment.

In the exchange above, Ken and Joshua discussed content and Joshua asked Ken to think on the spot. In tutorials I discussed in earlier chapters, both Michelle and Isabella asked to put off



the “thinking” until later; although both willingly came to the writing center to work on their writing, they did not seem prepared to think publicly. These three sessions highlight that students do not always consider or realize the inherent connection between thinking and writing. *I’ll work on my writing with you*, Ken seemed to suggest. *I’ll do my thinking elsewhere*.

It appears that Ken did, in fact, “think” in private. Just as Montaigne seeks to disrupt our ideas about the subjects about which he writes, in his final draft, Ken attempts to explain “Why the ‘man thong’ [is] viewed in such a negative way.” In added paragraphs, Ken works to debunk the myth that thongs are exclusively women’s wear by introducing the attire worn by sumo wrestlers. He describes these athletes in the manliest terms: they are “giant” and use their “strength.” He asks, “How could such an image as this be thought of anything other than the epitome of masculinity? Just man versus man [...]” Having defined sumo wrestlers as men, Ken introduces their attire, the *mawashi* which is “a belt that wraps around the waist and through the crotch leaving the butt cheeks completely exposed.” He continues, “the *Mawashi* provides a very similar image to that of the thong.” By using this thoughtful example, Ken gains significant ground in convincing readers that an aversion to the male thong is absurd. He begins his concluding paragraph with the question, “Why is it that we cannot look at the male thong as homage to masculinity as in the case of sumo wrestling?” This is an interesting idea and, perhaps if developed further, quite a Montaigne-esque<sup>36</sup> way of introducing a new way of thinking about the male thong.

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<sup>36</sup> When Davis introduced Montaigne and his writing to Ken and his classmates, he listed several features and characteristics of Montaigne’s that students were to look for and later model. Davis indicated that Montaigne is credited with inventing the essay (and *essai*, in French, is a verb that means “to try”). Montaigne, then, used his writing to attempt to come to an understanding of various ideas and mores using the first person and examples from other cultures and time periods.

Joshua was able to read the final version of Ken's paper as he prepared his CCCC paper and reflected that with the *mawashi* example, Ken "hit upon his answer without realizing it: just as it is not the *mawashi* itself but traditional Japanese culture that makes it a masculine symbol, it is not the thong itself but contemporary American culture that makes it a feminine symbol."

Ken's paper is a risky one. He saw his topic as primarily humorous, but it also had the potential to offend. As I sat in the writing center as this session was being taped, a first-year female student working at another table caught my eye as Joshua said, "Yeah, that's why some of my friends are considering a move to maybe boxer briefs or something like that, something tighter that's not gonna 'wedgify.'" Her expression registered shock: "What are they talking about?" she asked me.

Ken revised this paper mostly by adding to it. The transitions are still jarring and the closing is abrupt, but in the added paragraphs Ken did, I think, offer a complication to the feelings he imagined most people have of the male thong. Nevertheless, Ken did not work on the dissonant logic (about the thong as inherently feminine) Joshua encouraged him to consider. And, in fact, Joshua himself seemed uncomfortable with the questions he raised, quickly allowing Ken to steer the conversation in a different direction. In Joshua's defense, I observed above that tutorials seem most effective when students set the agenda, but I wonder if a fuller, riskier discussion might have resulted in a riskier, deeper inquiry about the question of the thong as a signifier of gender identity. Such a discussion would have required Joshua to not only wait for Ken to answer a question like, "do you think there's something about womanhood that's sort of tied up in sexuality?" but also to encourage Ken to actually think/talk through this issue rather than leaving it as a "question to consider." An important finding from this study, then, is that tutors are not always sure how to encourage public thinking in the writing center. The

implication is that writing center theory (scholarship) and practice (tutor training) might work on deconstructing the writing/thinking dichotomy.

Finally, I was surprised by how difficult tutors found it to identify potential for conceptual revision when they tutored papers that *seemed* pretty good. Another way to say this is that the tutors were not particularly effective at identifying conceptual weaknesses in well-edited papers. While this finding might not have surprised me in a classroom peer response setting, it raises a red flag that tutors who are chosen to tutor in part because of their own skill as careful writers may need more extensive training about how to carefully read others' papers.

Many of the students in my study – Michelle, Pamela, and Rachel – wrote fairly “clean” papers, that is, papers that were relatively free from grammatical errors, that had logical organizations, and that posited thesis statements when appropriate. Some tutors seemed less likely to ask these students questions about the content of their papers than when they tutored students – Isabella, Kiki, Max, and Ken – whose writing was less “clean.”

When Hilary tutored Michelle's second paper – on essays from David Sedaris's *Naked* – the session lasted only 13 minutes total, and Hilary took nine minutes to read the paper. Schmidt's assignment instructed students to:

Choose two essays from David Sedaris' *Naked*. Draw a substantive connection between them. Discuss and develop the connection in your paper. You may also refer to other essays or moments in the book.

In her paper, “On the Move,” Michelle focused on “A Plague of Tics,” which illustrates the “tics” Sedaris had during his childhood, and on “C.O.G.,” an essay about his nomadic life as an adult. Her argument is, “As a child, his tics never allowed him to remain in one place for too long, and although he eventually overcame his tics, his constant need to move persisted

throughout his life.” The paper is cleanly written in that it has a coherent structure (though it does switch between childhood and adulthood), exhibits few, if any, fragments, run-ons, or other grammatical problems, and draws on direct textual evidence from the book. In a few places, Michelle ends paragraphs with quoted material.

In the three or so minutes they took to discuss the paper, Hilary dominated the conversation. She began,

*Hilary:* Okay. I think it's a very good paper. Actually, you seem to talk about – I assume this is your thesis here talking about this text and the constant need for movement throughout his life, and you show that. This seems like a pretty interesting book.

*Michelle:* Yeah. It was.

*Hilary:* Really I don't see huge problems at all. There's just a few little things, but structurally it looks very good. You seem to support your thesis throughout your paper, and I liked your conclusion with the change and everything.

Just as she began, Hilary then listed issues that she thought Michelle should address before turning in the paper: typos, moving page numbers to end of sentence; using semi-colons instead of colons; commenting on quotes that currently end paragraphs; combining short paragraphs. Before they finished, Hilary suggested that Michelle see her professor.

This session is, in a word, disappointing. Hilary took her time reading the paper; she made nine suggestions total, the most significant of which had to do with following quotations with analysis. This type of session, unlike most of those I observed in DePauw's Writing Center, is primarily a “fix-it” session.

One difficulty with the paper is that although Michelle seemed to understand that Sedaris's tics have a psychological and/or physiological root (she does write “the strange behaviors were uncontrollable”), she sometimes dismissed their severity by claiming that Sedaris could control them if he really wanted to. For example, she writes, “Wherever Sedaris went, he

felt the need to perform his rituals”; “He had it set in his mind that he must perform these rituals”; “He felt it necessary to count every single step.” Two other times, she comments that “even if he tried to stop his tics, he couldn’t” and “These rituals he performed were a product of an obvious mental disorder.” Michelle’s writing conveys that she isn’t quite sure what to make of the tics: she claims they’re uncontrollable, but she also suggests that Sedaris has some control when she writes he “felt the need” or that he “set his mind” to behaving this way.

Though Michelle’s paper contains several lucid and well-articulated points, the conclusion leaves much to be desired, primarily because it suggests that the sole purpose for Sedaris’ childhood tics was the opportunity to “feel new sensations.” It is clear from the collected essays that there is more to Sedaris’s tics than feeling new sensations. Therefore, Michelle’s conclusion – “Carrying over into his adult life, he still yearned to continually feel new sensations even though he no longer suffered from the tics. It didn’t matter to him if it was a change in location or a change of occupation: he just needed a change” – falls flat. To begin, “change” wasn’t a key term throughout the paper so it seems strange that it arises prominently in the concluding remarks. Moreover, in neither the body nor in the conclusion does Michelle persuasively or consistently illustrate how changing jobs or physically moving creates “new sensations.”

The draft of this paper, in my mind, is adequate, but not yet fully executed. But Hilary found the paper to be solid and strong and offered the most minimal sort of advice. One of the fundamental ideas in the writing center is that every paper can benefit from the input of a thoughtful reader, but Hilary did not give Michelle much input. She didn’t ask any questions. She didn’t seem to consider the question, “How could this paper be better?”

Perhaps this is a critique of one aspect of the tutor training DePauw's tutors receive. It is true that the tutor training course meetings at DePauw typically focus on tutoring students whose papers have significant problems; few meetings address how to comment on or work with students whose papers are or seem to be quite good. In several of the other sessions I recorded, tutors struggled, as Hilary did, to find substantive issues to work on with students even when their papers revealed that there were, in fact, weaknesses. These sessions indicate that more tutor training should focus on strategies for helping students whose papers seem effective. Such training might begin with tutors discussing a paper like Michelle's and coming up with strategies for asking questions about texts that the tutors are not familiar with. If even one of the usually 10-12 tutors in the training seminar noted the contradiction between the tics as uncontrollable and Sedaris's behavior as under his own control, the whole group might become more aware of their own strategies for reading students' papers and what they tend to focus on (for example, issues of writing mechanics, issues of quote integration, issues of logic, etc.).

To Hilary, and to other tutors who find the papers they read "very good," I would suggest that reading the paper aloud is never a bad strategy; students rarely hear their own words and are sometimes surprised by them. By reading papers aloud, problems may become visible in ways they weren't previously. For example, although Hilary claims that the conclusion is good and interesting in the way it introduces "change," it is possible that by hearing the paper, one or both of them will question whether introducing "change" is appropriate and thus question whether the conclusion is as effective as Hilary thinks it is. Another advantage of reading the paper – or parts of it – aloud is that together, Hilary and Michelle could work on strengthening the analysis where necessary, specifically after the quotations. In addition, it is possible that they would identify wordiness (which Schmidt commented on in Michelle's previous paper), sections that do not

seem relevant (for example, the section about Sedaris' family), or loose transitions. It is also possible that none of this will happen, but this session highlights that tutors need to have strategies for tutoring students whose papers they initially think are very strong.

## **6.2 WHERE SURPRISES LEAD**

Reflecting on the surprises has also caused me to imagine where this research might lead. The present study allowed me to make observations and preliminary arguments about the work that happens during writing center tutorials, but it has also suggested several other avenues for inquiry.

First, in Chapter 2, I noted surprise about the kind of feedback that classroom peers often provide to one another. In particular, I thought that because they have knowledge of classroom culture and assigned readings, classroom peers would offer insight into revisions that writing center tutors cannot. My finding that classroom peers do not seem to address the assigned readings suggests that research that more fully explores the differences between the feedback offered by classroom peers and the feedback offered by writing center tutors would be useful. The limited data I have about classroom peer response suggests that classroom peers do not really know how to offer helpful feedback or to frame feedback in useful ways. It seems to me that students need more direct instruction about how to offer useful feedback, and then they need feedback about the feedback they have provided.

To test this hypothesis, I can imagine designing a study that seeks to learn how classroom peers discuss others' work. This would likely involve obtaining consent from students to record their peer response activities in the classroom. It would also mean asking instructors to consent

to recording their instruction about peer response. Analysis of peers' conversations that coded for instances of questions, evaluative statements, engagement with assigned readings about which student were writing and so forth might reveal how instructors could better prepare students for peer response.

Second, many of my observations also raise questions about the training peer tutors receive. Another version of this project might involve a record not of first-year students' tutorials but of a given tutor's tutorials throughout an entire semester or year. Whether trained prior to or at the same time they begin tutoring, tutors should become more skilled with time.<sup>37</sup> In practice, this would mean that, over time, tutors give fewer directions and ask more questions; they become less product-centered and more focused on a paper's potential; they talk less and listen more, and so on. Video-tapes of several tutors' tutorials would reveal how tutors employ various theoretical strategies and how the strategies employed change over time. Along with interviews and records about the tutors' training, analysis of tutorials could contribute to greater understanding of tutor training methodologies, especially in giving insight into those strategies that are most effective.

Finally, more data similar to that which I have already collected could lead to better conclusions about some of the claims I have made: that tutors do important work in acclimating students to the demands of a college curriculum; that revision is most interesting when it is simultaneously reader- and writer-based; that feedback is most useful when writers set the agenda for the kind of feedback they require; that tutors must be trained to effectively tutor

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<sup>37</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter 3, DePauw's peer tutors enroll in a tutor training practicum during the same semester they begin tutoring. DePauw is not alone in using this model and it makes sense for some compelling reasons. In terms of training itself, it means that tutors can apply what they are learning during the practicum in their tutorials immediately and vice-versa: this is inherently praxis-based pedagogy. In a material way, this arrangement allows the writing center to be staffed for more hours during a school year because tutors are not paid during their training semester (they earn course credit instead).



students and papers whose writing abilities vary; that students' voices sometimes emerge most clearly when a chorus has surrounded their writing processes; and that studying student writing along with tutorial transcripts offers the fullest way of understanding how students revise and in relation to what cues. These claims could be more strongly made if they are substantiated by a larger sample and over a longer period of time.

Seven students – my study's sample size – was a good start and was a manageable number to follow for this dissertation. However, there are also limitations to this sample size. Of the seven first-year students, one (Rachel) used the writing center only once; it is hard to tell if – and would be hard to believe that – the writing center played much of a role in her development as a reviser. Of the other five students, Kiki and Isabella had the most work to do in terms of becoming “proficient” writers. So while they used the writing center the most, it isn't terribly surprising that their writing was consistently most revised and their development as writers/revisers is most pronounced. I think my data suggests that the tutorials Kiki and Isabella participated in did facilitate their revisions and their development as writers. The remaining four students – Michelle, Pamela, Ken and Max – used the writing center three to five times during the semester, and while I would say that in some of those cases the tutorial did help the students produce “better writing,” in other cases the results are less clear. It is also hard to conclude that the tutorials helped any of them become substantially “better writers.”

An additional limitation of my study was the time period over which I studied these students: just one semester, only 14 weeks. I think that if I were to pursue this research, the study would have to extend through another semester, especially through a second writing intensive course (if the university required one). The reasons for this are fairly clear: few in Composition Studies or in an English Department would argue that a single semester is long enough for

students to develop sophisticated writing strategies. To draw significant conclusions based on one semester's worth of data would be irresponsible. If I continued the study at DePauw – which would be difficult given that students can take the W course in their 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup> semester – that would mean observing tutorials (and perhaps classrooms?) of the students when they enroll in the sophomore-level W courses offered across the disciplines. At another institution, for example, Catawba College where I begin teaching this fall, a similar study might involve recording tutorials of students enrolled in the two required composition courses, one offered during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester and the second offered during students' 4<sup>th</sup> semester. Studying students over a longer period of time would bring this research more in-line with what seems to be the current preferred method of composition studies research: the longitudinal study. My study's emphasis on questions about how writing center peer tutorials influence students' revisions separates it from longitudinal studies that are interested in questions about students' development of writers more generally.

Finally, in the writing center strand of this study, I used exclusively qualitative methods for analyzing tutorials and students' writing. Such qualitative methods – because they resemble the “lore” and site-specific projects that have long circulated in writing center scholarship – are now quite unpopular with a growing number of writing center scholars. It would be interesting to return to the tutorial transcripts and papers I have discussed and draw quantitative data from them. For example, the degree of revision between drafts and final versions of these papers could be measured quantitatively by counting the number of changes to words, phrases, sentences, and theme (similar to methods used in the 1980s by Sommers and Faigley and Witte). Such quantitative data could compliment and complicate the qualitative analysis of revision I have offered here.

But even as a strictly qualitative project, my research offers writing center scholarship a new model for studying the effect of tutors' work on students' revision and a reexamination of some of the claims and findings that have pervaded our discipline(s) (e.g. "students revise in narrow ways," and "writing centers help produce better writers, not better writing"). When, at 2008 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Jenna – another peer tutor on my panel – showed a video clip from a session with Kiki in which Kiki excitedly tore her paper from Jenna's hands in order to record the sentence they had composed, an audience member suggested showing it to any administrator who questioned the value of the work done in writing centers. My qualitative research methods offer writing center scholarship a fuller sense of the relationship that exists between the instruction students receive in first-year composition classrooms and in the writing center, and the impact that tutorials, specifically, have on students' emerging sense of what it means to revise.

More than contributing to our evolving writing center theory, my methods – particularly the way I read student texts in light of tutorials – offers a compelling model of how, on a practical level, writing program administrators could employ such readings of student writing in order to enrich assessment procedures which, I would argue, are often too focused on easily counted factors. What if, instead of reading student writing to deem it "proficient," assessments took a more holistic approach and considered drafts of papers as well as final copies? Though labor intensive, I imagine that such a procedure would offer a fuller sense of what students learn and how they mature as writers in a given writing program.

Like all ethnographic research methods, the methods I have used for this study are inevitably limited. Nonetheless, the data I collected, and the analysis of it that I present here, suggests that there is more to learn about students' development as revisers. My data suggests

that students do have more complex understandings of revision than they did a generation ago; it also reveals that students still consider “thinking” and “writing” as separate processes. This data further suggests that sustained attention to students’ collaborations with others, especially with classroom peers and peer tutors, can enrich our understanding of students’ revision practices. Finally, the study of students’ written products in conjunction with records of students’ collaborations reveals, to quote Bartholomae, the “drama” of students’ revising behaviors. Together, these various texts should inform our classroom and writing center pedagogies so that as teachers of writing we begin to empower students to do the work of revision that we have theorized.

## APPENDIX A

### QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTED TO FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

**Are you 18 years of age or older? (check one)**

- Yes. Please proceed with this questionnaire.
- No. Please stop here and return the questionnaire to the researcher. Thank you for your time.

Dear Student,

This questionnaire aims to find out something about your writing attitudes and behaviors. Some of the questions below ask you to choose an option that best explains your experiences with writing; others require you to write brief responses to questions about past writing experiences and instruction.

Unless otherwise instructed, please choose only one option for those questions that ask you to select an answer. If you require additional space for the responsive answers, please use the back of the page.

Leave blank any question that does not apply to you.  
When you have finished, please return the questionnaire to the researcher.

Thank you for participating.

### **Writing in high school courses**

- » Within a school context, what do you consider “regular” writing? (Check One)
  - Writing assigned daily during most weeks
  - Writing assigned a few times a week, but not daily, during most weeks
  - Writing assigned once a week, at the most, during most weeks
  - Writing assigned periodically, but not even once a week
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- » Did you take a course (or courses) in high school that required “regular” writing?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- » Did you write regularly for a high school class in any of the following subjects? (Check all that apply)
  - English
  - History
  - Science
  - Math
  - Social Studies
  - Health
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- » In what one course and year (e.g. “AP English and Literature/Senior Year” or “World History/Sophomore Year”) did you write the most during high school?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **High school writing instruction**

- » In the writing/composition courses you took in high school, did a teacher ever teach writing as a process?
  - Yes Course(s) \_\_\_\_\_
  - No
  
- » If yes, what did you understand writing as a process to mean?

» Which of the following did **your teachers** discuss in relation to writing or the processes of writing? (check all that apply)

- Draft
- Edit
- Feedback
- Peer-response
- Peer-edit
- Peer-review
- Plan
- Proof-reading
- Product
- Revise
- Rewrite
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

» Which of the following do **you** regularly do when you write for school? (check all that apply)

- Draft
- Edit
- Get feedback (from an outside reader)
- Plan
- Proof-read
- Revise
- Rewrite
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

For the following questions, think about writing you have composed to turn-in to someone. Examples include, but are not limited to, writing that was assigned for school, college application essays, formal letters for jobs or internships, and writing you have submitted to contests.

» What do you do when you **edit** something you have written?

» What do you do when you **proof-read** something you have written?

- » What do you do when you **revise** something you have written?

For the following questions, think about only writing that you composed for school a purpose, that is, writing that a high school teacher assigned to you.

- » In high school, did a teacher ask/instruct you to do any of the following before you submitted the writing assignment to them? (check all that apply)
  - Edit
  - Proof-read
  - Revise
  
- » Whether or not your teacher asked you to, how often did you **edit** the writing you turned in to be graded?
  - Always
  - Most of the time
  - Sometimes
  - Infrequently
  - Never
  
- » Whether or not your teacher asked you to, how often did you **proof-read** the writing you turned in to be graded?
  - Always
  - Most of the time
  - Sometimes
  - Infrequently
  - Never
  
- » Whether or not your teacher asked you to, how often did you **revise** the writing you turned in to be graded?
  - Always
  - Most of the time
  - Sometimes
  - Infrequently
  - Never



## **Feedback**

For the following questions, think about only writing that you composed for a school purpose, that is, writing that a high school teacher assigned to you.

- » Did you let or ask someone else read your writing before you handed it in?
  - Always
  - Most of the time
  - Sometimes
  - Infrequently
  - Never
  
- » Who typically read an assignment before you handed it in? (check all that apply)
  - Teacher who assigned the writing
  - A different teacher
  - A single peer from the class for which the writing was assigned
  - A peer-response group formed in the class for which the writing was assigned
  - A friend or friends not in the class for which the writing was assigned
  - A parent or parental figure
  - Only you
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- » If you shared your work with others before you turned it in, how did you *usually* give it to them?
  - Paper copy – typed
  - Paper copy – handwritten
  - On a computer
  - Via e-mail
  - On-line instructional site (like Blackboard)
  
- » If you received feedback before you turned your work in, in what form did you *usually* receive it?
  - Oral comments
  - Handwritten comments
  - Typed comments
  - E-mailed comments
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Feedback on writing can pertain to many different aspects of your writing. For example, some feedback might be about punctuation errors and some feedback might be about whether your paper is organized effectively. There are many other possibilities. If you received feedback before you turned your work in, describe to what that feedback usually pertained.

- » Was the feedback you received from others helpful to you as you revised your work?
  - Always
  - Most of the time
  - Sometimes
  - Infrequently
  - Never
  - Not applicable
  
- » Describe the feedback about your writing that you found the most helpful.

Thank you for your time.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE WRITING COMPETENCE PROGRAM**

Students whose first language is not English sometimes need expert instruction not available in College Writing I or College Writing II.

#### **DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES**

##### **College Writing I for Non-Native Speakers of English (English 100)**

#### **I. Course Description**

This course is a developmental course in academic writing stressing the expression and analysis of ideas, arguments and evaluations in academic English. Students write short expository essays based on their personal and cultural experiences. Students practice writing clearly, precisely and fluently in standard American English; students are also introduced to the form and methods of academic writing. Through reading, discussion and writing, students increase their command of vocabulary and idiom. Grammar problems are treated on an individual basis.

- A. Class Size  
Not more than 15 students per section.
- B. Reading and Reference Materials:  
Texts will include a handbook and selected readings.
- C. Pedagogy
  1. This course will be graded pass/no pass
  2. Students write both in and out-of-class, formal and informal, paragraphs and short essays, of ascending levels of difficulty.

- D. Outcomes
1. recognize the controlling idea (thesis statement) of reading assignments and of their own writing
  2. Write sentences, paragraphs and essays with clearly stated main points and supporting evidence
  3. Demonstrate control of syntax and grammar

## **College Writing I for Native Speakers (English 120)**

### **I. Course Description**

This course reviews good writing strategies to prepare students for the level of reading and writing and critical thinking done in College Writing II. By means of short essay assignments, some of which may be reflections upon their own experience, students will build fluency and confidence in writing. Focus will be on writing fluency, stylistic clarity and language use proficiency.

- A. Class Size:  
Each section will be limited to 15 students.
- B. Reading and Reference Materials:  
Texts will include a handbook and selected readings.
- C. Pedagogy
1. This course will be graded pass/no pass
  2. A minimum of 16 pages will be generated; this amount may include drafts and in-class essays. Various configurations are possible (e.g. six 2-3 page papers, 4 papers of 4-5 pages, or a combination of different lengths. One end-of the semester 16 page paper does not accomplish the goals of the course, unless it has been developed out of shorter drafts sequenced throughout the semester.
  3. Diverse types of assignments are recommended. Informal, non-evaluated in-class writing is encouraged. Appropriate assignments include:
    - essays introducing various kinds of rhetorical strategies (e.g. argument, exposition, and narration) with attention to appropriate audiences
    - some form of evaluated in-class writing should be included.
    - a library project and appropriate training in the use of documented sources.
- D. Evaluation  
Students will be evaluated on their ability to:
- understand the uses of writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating
  - know how to focus on a purpose and respond to the need of different audiences

- adopt appropriate voice, tone and level of formality
  - understand how genres shape reading and writing
- E. Outcomes  
By the end of the course students should feel confident to continue college level writing in English 130
- F. Syllabus
1. All instructors will give a copy of their syllabus to the English Department secretary
  2. The Syllabus will include course objectives and desired outcome statements; it should also inform students about grading practices and standards.

## **FOUNDATIONAL COURSE**

### **College Writing II (English 130)**

#### **I. Course Description**

This course introduces students to college level critical reading and writing and inquiry. [or college level critical inquiry through reading and writing practice.]

- A. Class Size  
Each section will be limited to 15 students.
- B. Reading and Reference Materials  
Texts will include a handbook and selected readings. Readings for the course should be substantive, and have traditionally been selected from various genres: (e.g. critical essay, memoir, novel, drama). The emphasis is on developing critical reading skills, not introducing genres. Many instructors organize the readings around one or more themes.
- C. Pedagogy
1. A minimum of 18 pages will be evaluated; this amount may include drafts and in-class essays. Various configurations are possible (e.g. six 3-5 page papers, 4 papers of 4-5 pages, or a combination of different lengths. One end-of-the-semester 18-page paper does not accomplish the goals of the course, unless it has been developed out of shorter sequenced drafts due throughout the semester.
  2. Diverse types of assignments are recommended. Informal, non-evaluated in-class writing is encouraged. Appropriate assignments include:
    - essays introducing various kinds of rhetorical strategies, including argument, exposition, narration and attention to appropriate audiences.
    - some form of evaluated in-class writing.
    - a library project and appropriate training in the use of documented sources.

3. English 130 will teach the process of writing. Students will learn that a writing assignment is a series of tasks, which include finding, evaluating, analyzing and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources alone and integrating their own ideas with those of others.
4. Instructors will define plagiarism and discuss strategies for good practice in documentation.

D. Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on their ability to:

- generate essays appropriate to the writing task, demonstrating an ability to control the focus of the paper and paragraphs
- write with some fluency, including demonstrating control of such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling
- use appropriate means of documenting their work
- focus on purpose and respond to the needs of different audiences
- adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

E. Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

- understand the uses of writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating
- demonstrate flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- understand how genres shape reading and writing
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- be able to critique their own and others' works

F. Syllabus

- All instructors will give a copy of their syllabus to the English Department secretary
- The Syllabus will include course objectives and desired outcome statements and should inform students about grading practices and standards

**GUIDELINES: W COURSES**  
approved by the  
Writing Program Coordinating Committee  
December 5, 2000

**I. Course Description**

W courses are offered in several academic disciplines each semester, have limited enrollments and give one course credit. They combine an emphasis on academic content with practice in writing. Such courses encourage (1) the logical development of argument, clear and precise diction, and a coherent prose style, (2) the development of general skills of expository writing as they apply in academic disciplines and (3) the reasonable, appropriate and effective use of special or technical language.

**II. Course Procedures**

- A. Class size  
There shall be no more than 20 students per class.
  
- B. Course load  
Because the discussion and use of writing could take some time away from traditional course content, instructors should be aware that the course work load may need to be adjusted to accommodate the writing component.
  
- C. Resources and reference materials
  1. Instructors are encouraged to introduce their students to the Writing Center early in the semester; the Writing Center is available as a resource to students in the W classes and to the professor teaching them.
  2. Writing handbooks and other resource materials are available in the Writing Center. Many students already own a copy of Diana Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual from their College Writing II courses. This handbook contains summaries of the MLA, APA and Chicago styles for citations, including information about citing electronic sources. Instructors are encouraged to use the style sheet most often used in their disciplines and the most current version of it.
  
- D. Pedagogy
  1. A minimum of 16 pages or 4000 words. Various combinations are possible (e.g. four papers of 4 to 6 pages, eight papers of 2 to 3 pages, or a combination of different lengths). One end-of-the-semester 16-page paper does not accomplish the goals of a W course, unless it has been sequenced into smaller drafts throughout the semester.
  2. Diverse types of assignments are recommended. Informal, non-evaluated in-class writing is encouraged.
  3. Assignments must include at least one documented paper.

4. A W course should teach about the process of writing. Strategies such as preliminary drafts, peer review and outlines should be encouraged. Each student will have at least one conference with the instructor concerning the writing assignments.
5. The instructor should discuss plagiarism and demonstrate good practice in documentation during the semester. Students need guidance about the careful use of all ideas that are not their own.

E. Evaluation

1. The diverse nature of W courses means that evaluation methods will vary across the curriculum. Instructors are encouraged to exchange papers with another W-certified faculty member during the semester.
2. Instructors should consider including an essay question as one component of the final exam. In some courses, other types of in-class writing are more appropriate. Any evaluated writing may be included in the 16-page minimum.

### **III. Exit Standards**

Demonstrated ability to write adequately both in and out of the classroom, according to the goals stated in the course description.

### **IV. Syllabi**

Every W course will have a current syllabus which reflects its nature as a writing course. These syllabi will be collected by the Writing Program Coordinating Committee (WPCC) each semester and will be kept in the Writing Center. Faculty are encouraged to use these syllabi as reference points for creating and evaluating their own courses.

### **V. W Committee of the Whole**

The instructors teaching W courses in any given semester will constitute a committee-of-the-whole which will meet for workshops organized by the Writing Program Coordinator and the Writing Center Director. This committee may make recommendations to the WPCC.



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