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The Vernacular Architecture of Composition Instruction: What the Voices of Writing Center Tutors Reveal about the Influence of Standardized Instruction and Assessment

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THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE OF COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION:
WHAT THE VOICES OF WRITING CENTER TUTORS REVEAL ABOUT THE
INFLUENCE OF STANDARDIZED INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Dawn Fels

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August 2010

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Title: The Vernacular Architecture of Composition Instruction: What the Voices of Writing Center Tutors Reveal about the Influence of Standardized Instruction and Assessment

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This study explores the effects of institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment on students' work, agency, and identities and holds that one of the best ways to identify those effects is to ask students who serve as writing center tutors.

Findings stem from the experiences of 56 graduate and undergraduate writing center tutors from 16 two- and four-year colleges and universities located throughout 10 regions of the United States. Over a three-year period, 53 tutors were interviewed in 17 small groups. Interviews yielded approximately 26 hours of recorded conversation and 246 pages of transcribed data. In addition, 51 tutors returned self-assessment inventories and 30 returned written responses to e-mailed prompts. Emergent themes from the coded transcripts were compared with findings from the self-assessments and written narratives.

Findings point to tutors' (and students') expertise in identifying effects of institutionalized demands on tutors, students, and faculty. Tutors described institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment and attributed them to societal hegemonies, academic epistemologies, and individual ideologies. They articulated the effects of these demands on faculty's instruction and assessment and on students' composing processes, agency in their learning, and identities as aspiring members of academic and disciplinary discourse communities. Especially telling are the effects on basic writers, first-year students, and English Language Learners. Tutors point

to students' passive willingness to comply with demands, even if doing so means having to "become someone else" or make up experiences they have not had when writing.

Tutors described how the weight of consequences for meeting or not meeting demands constrained them, too. Those challenges led tutors to question their role and efficacy. They also questioned whether a binary relationship really existed between institutional demands for writing and students' personal goals. In assessing the value of their work, tutors also pointed to a disjuncture between what they were trained to do and students' and faculty's expectations of them.

These findings add students' voices to those of scholars who study the effects of institutional, standardized demands for writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Five years ago, my family pulled up stakes and moved half-way across the country so I could attend IUP. I arrived on campus with many years of teaching in classrooms and writing centers already behind me, yet I remember sitting in my first class and thinking, *I do not belong here*. In fact, that was the first line of the first draft of this dissertation. I wrote it because I came from circumstances that often stand as obstacles to students who hope to attend college. And there I was, entering a doctoral program. And here I am now, having finished that program and this dissertation. I beat the odds, and I have a lot of people to thank for helping me do that.

I dedicate this work to my children, Cameron and Zada, who might celebrate its completion more than anyone. For three years of their young lives, I spent many hours away from them, conducting interviews, transcribing tapes, or writing at the dining room table. I thank them for their patience, encouragement, and willingness to eat meals in the living room, especially during the final weeks when the dining room table disappeared under stacks of data, drafts, and books. I must also thank Brad Fels. In the twenty years we have known each other, I have been in graduate school for nearly half of them. For his frequent support and heavy lifting over the years, I am grateful.

I owe the idea of this study to my former students and colleagues at a high school where I directed the writing center and taught English. Our school was placed on corrective action one year after No Child Left Behind became law, and our classrooms and writing center became default stops for state auditors. Those were the hardest, yet most formative three years of my career. Through courage and collaboration, students and teachers worked hard to doff the negative labels applied to them and the school. This

study extends a research agenda spawned by those experiences. To my former students, many of whom have cheered me on throughout this process, I extend my sincerest thanks for teaching me that students' voices matter.

The conversations I had with my high school students compelled me to focus this study on students' experiences with standard demands for writing. I owe the significance of this work to the voices and expertise of 56 writing center tutors from across the United States, many of whom I drove to meet during the height of the gas crisis. (That travel was made possible with grant money generously provided from the International Writing Centers Association.) I am indebted to those tutors for their willingness to speak on a topic that was not always a comfortable one to talk about, and I applaud their courage to do so. I also wish to thank the writing center directors who helped recruit tutors or who worked in other ways to make our conversations possible. Their tutors' reflections enriched this research in ways I could not have anticipated and reinforced my belief that one way to create systemic change in writing instruction and assessment is through collaborative work between writing centers and composition programs.

For his enduring, enthusiastic support of my work, I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Ben Rafoth, my dissertation advisor and mentor. His reputation in both the writing center and composition fields drew me to IUP in the first place. Dr. Rafoth's task was no small feat. During the three years that it took me to complete this study, he also directed our graduate program and taught undergraduate and graduate classes. I thank him for never sending me away when I appeared unannounced at his door and for the countless hours we worked together at his office, the local coffee shop, or his kitchen table.

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There are several others I'd like to thank for their love, friendship, and encouragement during the years it took me to plan and complete this study. Whether from the other end of the dining room table, where he sat working on his own dissertation, or 6,000 miles away in his family's home, Mahmoud Amer bore the brunt of my dissertation anxieties for three years, always answering them with warm reassurance, a cup of fresh coffee, a long walk—and when miles separated us—flowers and encouraging emails. I could not have asked for a better dissertating partner, colleague, or friend. Several other of my “IUP peeps” saw me through to the celebration, some with daily (even hourly) words of encouragement. I'd especially like to thank Abdullah Dagamseh, Amar Jaamoor, Amanda Goldberg, Andrew Jeter, April Sikorski, Brent House, Renae Applegate House, Brian Cope, Brian Fallon, Cynthia Payne, Jennifer Wells, Khawla Kittaneh, Kim Thomas, Marjie Stewart, Natalie Dorfeld, Roseanne Gatto, and Whitney Sarver. I especially thank Marjie for modeling dining room table etiquette while dissertating (just eat in the living room) and for reading drafts of sections when I asked her to.

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Finally, I have always credited Mary Wille, my high school English teacher, with inspiring me to teach and for showing me that teaching isn't about doing what's popular but doing what's right by students. I can now make-good on that promise I made to her during my senior year in high school. She'd asked me what I planned to do with my life, to which I responded, "I am going to get a Ph.D. in English, and I am going to write a book." She knew I faced incredible odds, but she never discouraged me. Tomorrow, I will write her a letter. *Dear Mrs. Wille, I'll begin. I did it! And the book is in the works.*

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INTRODUCTION

WRITING CENTERS AS VERNACULAR SITES

The distinguishing feature of traditional vernacular is that design and construction are often done simultaneously, onsite, by the same people. At least some of those who eventually use the building are often involved in its construction or at least have direct input in its form. (“Vernacular Architecture,” 2006)

I first ran across the term *vernacular architecture* in a magazine that featured winners of an annual design contest. The term accompanied two photographs of an old stone house. In one, the single-story structure sits nearly hidden by flowing, waist-high weeds. In the other is the house as it appears today. A family redesigned the modest structure to meet their contemporary needs but preserved the integrity of the home’s original footprint. Now, the home’s simple exterior hides the intelligent redesign of its interior: the communal benefits of the open floor plan, the efficiency of the contemporary kitchen at the heart of the home, and the sweeping views of the surrounding prairie.

The article described the original structure as a pioneer house, a perfect example of early 19th century vernacular architecture. I stared at the before and after photographs of the house and imagined the lives of the families who called the house their home for well over a century. I thought of the stories the house might tell—stories about those who built the original home, their solitary lives alone on the open prairie, their limited resources, and the ways in which young and old alike must have had to work together to sustain themselves.

The epigraph at the beginning of this introduction suggests that vernacular buildings are designed and redesigned over long periods of time to meet the needs of those who inhabit them. Studying the history of vernacular sites is important to understanding the culture that surrounds them and the needs of those who inhabit them—past, present, and future. Vernacular buildings are “built from old patterns...then perpetuate cultural norms and accumulated building craft” (“Vernacular Architecture,” 2006). Change to vernacular sites is slow, gradual, but sustaining.

Writing centers are vernacular sites that reveal old patterns of experience within society, the academy, and the composition field. Those patterns include values tied to a college education, what good writing looks like, and what good writers do. During their century long existence, writing centers have evolved as new students, new pedagogies, and new standards mixed with long-held cultural norms for writing and writing instruction. The results? Slow but gradual change to both classrooms and writing centers, to teaching and to learning. Over time, shifts in writing instruction and writing center work have impacted the literacy lives of those students and tutors who inhabit classrooms and writing centers, and according to the tutors who participated in this study, that impact has not always been positive or productive.

In 1994, Steven North suggested that the writing center field move away from the well-worn metaphorical depiction (or hope?) that writing centers become “center[s] of consciousness” and move toward a rendering of the writing center “as institutional *conscience*, that small nagging voice that ostensibly reminds the institution of its duties regarding writing” (p. 15). In this study, that voice comes from

peer tutors who reveal the influence of standardized writing instruction and assessment on students in ways that scholars and faculty cannot. That said, this study does not seek to add another metaphor to the long list of metaphors for writing center work (i.e. labs, clinics, asylums, safe houses, glass houses, hospitals, fix-it shops, fast food restaurants, studios, or virtual, third spaces). I refer to writing centers as vernacular sites to call attention to the effects of the cultural norms for writing on teaching and learning. I position writing centers as vernacular sites where the effects of the cultural norms for writing, which have become institutionalized over time, affect tutors' and students' work, agency, and identities. I refer to tutors and students as vernacular architects to make readers aware of the resourceful, collaborative work that takes place in writing center sessions as tutors and students co-construct new knowledge and identities for themselves. Thus, my use of vernacular architecture points to how institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment have changed the process of teaching and learning. My reference to tutors and students as vernacular architects also points to the promise of change that can still take place in writing centers and classrooms.

This study holds that tutors and students have the expertise to critique the cultural norms for writing instruction and assessment in ways that policy makers and faculty cannot. It also holds that tutors' and students' designs for writing instruction and for learning to write make their way back into communities, across classrooms, across disciplines, and across the many academic and professional discourse communities to which students belong or hope to join. It holds that what tutors'

voices reveal about the influence of institutionalized demands for writing on students can lead to systemic change within the composition and writing center fields.

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Peer tutoring programs have existed for a quarter of the writing center field's century long history (Kail, 1983; Bruffee, 2008; Lerner, 2003a), yet writing centers and writing center tutors remain an untapped resource in composition studies. This study positions writing centers as viable research sites through which the composition field might learn more about the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on writers' work, agency, and identities.

This study adds students' voices to a narrative composed by a number of scholars who decry the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning (Hillocks, 2002; Matsuda, 2006; Huot, 2007). Through written and spoken narratives, writing center tutors made visible the effects of institutionalized demands for writing on tutors' and students' work, agency, and identities. Tutors identified a host of standard demands imposed upon writers. They noted the negative effect of those demands on writers' composing processes, agency in their own learning, and identities. Tutors also described the strategies they employed, some surprising, to help writers meet, adapt, or resist the demands imposed upon them. Finally, by reflecting on writing center sessions, tutors pointed to the relationship between institutional demands and their own identities as tutors and students. Their dual status as tutor and student yielded perspectives that enrich scholars' notions of the positive and negative effects of institutionalized demands on students. Surprisingly, tutors' notions sometimes depart from them, too. That all tutors reported working with students who sought help with meeting demands raises

questions about the incompatibility between institutionalized demands for writing and students' personal goals. While the majority of tutors described the deleterious effects of institutionalized demands for writing on teaching and learning, there were several who believed that the institution's demands and the student's personal goals need not be mutually exclusive. Tutors delineated this and other tensions that complicated their work with students whose needs for good grades, credentials, and acceptance tutors well understood.

Tutors clearly saw how some standards affected certain student groups more than others. Those groups included first-year students, racial or cultural minorities, English Language Learners, and nontraditional students. In many ways, the tutors in my study helped to reinforce claims that some standards serve to perpetuate social ranking along economic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines (Grimm, 1999; Matsuda, 2006; Villanueva, 2006; Huot, 2007). In several striking examples, tutors described the extent to which students strove to "become someone else" in order to meet the demands of an instructor's assignment. Tutors' perspectives also illustrate the extent to which they attempted to disrupt, reorder, or preserve the social ranking and cultural norms associated with standards for writing.

Statement of the Problem

Describing habitus as the social "we" of the field, Bordieu (1991) observed that community members choose—subconsciously or deliberately—the degree to which they appropriate or resist the language of the milieu. No matter where on the continuum between appropriation and resistance members' choices fall, their work, identities, and relationships with other community members are affected. The array of

discourses available to community members combine with a host of other factors to complicate the process. Gee (2005) acknowledges that interconnection among discourses causes community members to

use language and “other stuff”—ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects, symbols, tools, and technologies—to recognize [themselves] and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways. In turn, [they] produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given “form of life” or Discourse. (p. 7)

In Chapter Five, readers will see how writing center tutors use “language and other stuff” when they talk to students about writing. Tutors’ and writers’ deliberately shift their discourses and rely on the “other stuff,” which they have acquired through membership in a variety of communities in their public and private lives. Included is experience in appropriating or resisting subjectivities imposed upon them by others’ expectations. Both tutor and writer use strategies gained from years of experience in and outside of the classroom. Their shifting, discursive practice is a learned, intellectual, socially constructed strategy. Entangled in that practice is the agency and identity of both the tutor and the writer.

Both tutor and writer consciously or subconsciously draw upon the language they have been trained to use—the language of the milieu or dominant Discourse (Gee, 2005) in English classrooms, the academy, and other systems that determine how writing is taught and why. As students, tutors come to their work in the writing center steeped in the Discourse of standardization. So do the writers who seek their help. The degree of agency that tutor and writer feel under the weight of others’

implicit or explicit expectations affects the way they relate to each other, to the writing, and to those expectations. Further complicating matters is that tutors “are already implicated in a system that makes the words ‘peer’ and ‘tutor’ appear to be a contradiction in terms” (Trimbur, 1987, p. 23). Because they are presumed to have more expertise with achieving standards for writing, tutors feel pressured to either demonstrate or downplay their authority.

According to Bruffee (2008), the writing center tutor’s role is to help students see “that writing is a personally engaging social activity” (p. 8), but this ideal is hard to achieve. For decades, compositionists, linguists, writing center scholars, and cultural theorists have pointed to how special interest groups have redefined the purpose for writing by influencing national education policies and accrediting criteria. For example, in his 2005 address to attendees of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, then Chair Doug Hesse asked, “Who owns writing?” His short answer is that those who *teach* writing must affirm that we, in fact, *own* it” (author’s emphasis, p. 338). But Hesse then contemporizes the realities that may prevent that, describing the encroachment of the federal government and test makers upon curricular and assessment policies. He refers to the new technologies that make quick and codified work of evaluation, and the threat that, already, too many students have come to view writing as a means to generate a score. To reinforce his point, Hesse goes back nearly fifteen years to Gere’s (1991) deconstruction of the relationship between public opinion and the teaching of writing.

If Hesse were to ask writing center tutors his question, their training would prompt an immediate answer: The writer owns writing. Writing center tutors are

trained to help writers learn that they are in control of their own papers. But tutors are not naive to the realities that writers face. They would agree with Hesse when he says that “ownership has the double sense of controlling use and assuming responsibility” (p. 337). But tutors know—because they are students—that someone else is typically in control of what students write, how they write, why they write, and as tutors who participated in my study suggested, how and what they think. Even Bruffee (2008) acknowledges that tutors must teach conventional writing if students are to survive (p. 7), and writing center tutors know this “survival” all too well. As students, they come to their jobs in the writing center conditioned to meet conventional expectations for writing and are aware of the consequences for failing to do so. Like other students, their lack of control over their writing affects their identities and relationship to the system of writing instruction and assessment, and to the culture of writing, in general. It also affects their work as tutors. They take this identity to their work in the writing center, where they are trained to know that their work is not simply a matter of helping writers achieve mastery of conventions, which some outside the center may expect. They find themselves shifting back and forth between the Discourse of academic convention and their other discourses as they attempt to connect with writers who, to varying degrees, feel disconnected from their own writing, or from the very act of writing.

This study’s findings may reinforce Hesse’s and Bruffee’s conclusions. They will certainly expand the composition and writing center field’s understanding of the circumstances that affect students’ success as writers. But the findings may also lead readers to question their own understanding of those circumstances and their role in

helping to create them. That writing center tutors—who are students themselves—provide that understanding is what sets this study apart from others. In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I let tutors’ voices tell their and students’ stories. As readers will see, tutors have more to say about the effects of institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning than has been previously acknowledged. This study presents tutors (and students) as credible research partners whose voices reveal the broader pedagogical and assessment issues created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment. Though what tutors reveal is significant to the writing center field, that significance goes far beyond the writing centers in which tutors work. This study pushes tutors’ insights back out into fields where policies, pedagogies, and assessment need to change.

Research Questions and Rationale

1. To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors’ practice and identities?
2. In what critical ways might tutors’ reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

In the cultural-historical tradition, learning is viewed as social practice situated in a specific historical and sociocultural context. Havnes (2004), who applied activity theory to his study of educational settings, claimed that research should focus on action patterns or ways of acting that tend to be consistent across individuals over time. In the writing center field, scholars call for more attention to be paid to what

goes on in the writing center session between tutor and writer (Boquet, 2002a; Grimm, 2003), not to generalize across all tutors, across all writers, but to deepen awareness of how institutionalized symbols and systems act upon individuals who have no power against them. The focus, then, moves away from individuals and differences among them to the *mechanisms* that make individuals act in similar ways within a given context. Language is among those mechanisms. The ways in which individuals use language to fulfill demands offer important clues when analyzing learning situations. The various D/discourses a writing center tutor uses, for example, are “mechanisms by which...tensions make their way into the process of learning as a social phenomenon” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162).

Writing centers are sites where peer tutoring programs illustrate the finest qualities of social constructionist pedagogy (Bruffee, 1984a; Lunsford, 1991/2008; Kail, 2008). This study treats writing centers as vernacular sites through which scholars might ask, Which cultural norms for writing instruction and assessment influence students’ writing? What do peer tutors and writers build together? What tools do they use? To answer those questions, this study explores the epistemological effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on student work, agency, and identity. Peer tutors’ dual status as both tutor and student offers scholars two lenses through which to learn more about those effects from a student’s point-of-view. Peer tutors’ paid positions implicate them in the delivery of institutionalized expectations for writing, yet their student status renders them objects of those same expectations. In addition, tutors are often trained to distance themselves and writers who seek their help from simply meeting those expectations. Tutors shift among these

two subjectivities and others during the writing center session, qualifying them to speak as experts on the effects of standardization on students in ways that compositionists and other scholars have not and cannot.

Framing this study were Bruffee's (1984a) assertions that peer tutors act as "knowledgeable peers" (p. 640) whose work in the collaborative setting of a writing center session "models the very ways through which knowledge is constructed in the academy" (Kail, 2008, p. 3). I worked from the belief that peer tutors' role in that construction makes them credible research partners in composition studies. Of particular interest was how tutors talked about the standards they saw imposed on writers and the strategies they employed while helping writers negotiate between those standards and their own personal goals for writing. That tutors drew upon their experience in the writing center differentiates this study from others that may offer conclusions on the effects of standardization on teaching and learning without fully limning the experience of students.

This study presumed that the best way to obtain information about the effects of standardization on students was to ask writing center tutors. Findings rely largely on tutors' written and spoken narratives. Those narratives served two purposes. They allowed tutors to become "autobiographically conscious" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 46) of their work. By relaying their stories, tutors' also added students' signatures to voiceless texts written about them—texts that have developed into narratives of their own (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Bruner, 1990). In 2006, compositionist Victor Villanueva denounced voiceless reports as those that deliberately rely on tropes to preserve the status quo, to divert attention away from

the real work that needs to be done. Using narratives as the primary data, I show tutors' "naming and framing [of] practices in which [they] have been schooled as well as those [they] have cultivated based on lived experience" (Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2007, p. 54). This study explored that intersection through tutors' spoken and written narratives.

Two research questions frame this study:

1. To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities, including:
 - 1) how tutors define institutional demands for writing;
 - 2) the agency tutors feel they have in helping writers improve;
 - 3) the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities; and
 - 4) the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.
2. In what critical ways might tutors' reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

Because this study is an empirical exploration of what tutors' narratives reveal, it is important to note that this study will not attempt:

- to lead tutors to respond to any one particular set of standards or policies that govern writing instruction and assessment;
- to compile an exhaustive list of standards imposed upon students today;

- to determine the degree to which the standards that tutors describe are, in fact, what they come up against during writing center sessions or their own work as student writers;
- to employ either direct observation or discourse analysis of writing center sessions as methods of data collection or analysis; or
- to attribute the demands tutors mention to their own institutions.

The rationale for this research seeks to add students' voices to the conversations about the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning. It features the narrative reflections of writing center tutors whose dual status as students and tutors renders them not only "objects" of the institutional expectations imposed on them but also "subjects" in the imposition of those expectations on others. Therefore, tutors' dual roles offer scholars two lenses through which to view the effects of standards on students' work, agency, and identities.

The rationale for this study stems from the work of scholars who encourage those who teach writing to increase their involvement in examining the hegemonies underlying the decisions that affect them and their students the most. Assessment experts have long noted that educators are often left out of assessment decisions, drastically reducing their ability to decide how and what to teach (Huot, 2007, 2003, 2002; Hillocks, 2002; Broad, 2003). To extend the consideration of classrooms as examples of vernacular architecture, it appears that educators and students are no longer the lead architects. Others have stepped in with their cultural norms for teaching writing and learning to write, which constrain what teachers and students are

able to build for themselves. Scholars emphasize the need for change and call for putting teaching and learning back into the hands of composition teachers and their students, a change that has yet to occur. Furthermore, despite the increase in scholarship that presents the effects of standardization on teachers' professional lives, most references to the effects on students are generalizations. This study adds students' voices to scholars' conversations.

This study shows that writing centers are well poised to add to the composition field's understanding of the effects of standardization on teaching and learning. Though not its primary purpose, the study also answers writing center scholars' calls for substantive studies into students' composing processes. In 1980, Brannon and North called for more action among directors and tutors to address tensions that exist in writing center conferences. Grimm (2003), along with others, has repeatedly pointed to a tension rooted in racist, classist ideologies, against which directors and tutors must fight if they are to remain committed advocates for writers. However, no one in the writing center field directly attributes those tensions to nationalized policies, nor to the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on tutors' and writers' experiences. Through tutors' reflections, this study does both.

Writing Centers as Research Sites for Studying the Effects of Standardization

In her history of writing centers, Boquet (1999) asked whether writing centers existed as liberatory or regulatory institutions. Like Hesse's question about who owns writing, Boquet's contrast raises issues of responsibility, accountability, and ownership and further demonstrates why writing center tutors' observations about

their work are important to any discussion about the effects of standardization on teaching and learning. If we were to imagine an accountability continuum, along which each conversation a tutor has with a writer could be plotted, we might imagine that at one end would be the liberatory advocacy work tutors are trained to perform and at the other, the more conventional accountability work with which tutors are familiar and rewarded as students. This study raises questions about who owns writing at each end of that continuum and points in between. As tutors suggested, the answer to that question depends. Their liberatory advocacy work may lead to better writing and other intrinsic benefits for the writer, but it may not lead to the external rewards, such as a good grade on a paper. Most students want (and some desperately need) good grades. In contrast, the nature of tutors' accountability work is characterized by helping students to meet institutional demands for writing and, as some tutors in this study explained, ways of thinking. A tutor's work, then, entangles them and the writer in a complicated, discursive process through which they work together in an attempt to negotiate between the personal needs of the writer and the expectations of others. Caught up in that practice—during each conversation—is the agency both tutor and writer feel they have over the task at hand. That degree of agency is both informed by and continues to form tutors' and writers' identities.

To borrow from activity theory, the expectations tutor and writer have before them serve as mechanisms to the collaborative work they do. Tutors described expectations that stem from conventional expectations, such as standards or “rules” found in scoring guides; professors' feedback; departmental course descriptions; credentialing committees' criteria; and in state and federal accreditation policies. But

tutors also acknowledged the presence of other expectations, some implicit, that stem from the traditions, ideologies, and hegemonies that affect how writing is taught within the academy. Other cultural norms exist that define how educated people are to act, think, write, and present themselves. Tutors demonstrated their awareness of how those rules symbolize long-rooted historical, social, and political beliefs about teaching, learning, and assessment. What those rules also point to are epistemologies tied to institutional or programmatic philosophies about composition instruction, the purpose for writing in a changing world, and tutors' and writers' feelings about their tasks and themselves as tutors and writers. The study demonstrates that tutors and students model the ways in which writing is taught and learned: those cultural norms and designs for how to write, what to write, and how to learn to be a writer. Tutors' reflections allowed them the opportunity to articulate how the rules manifest in their work as tutor and student and how those rules form their identities as both.

Benefits of the Study

This study benefits tutors, students, and every reader concerned with the teaching and learning of writing, including but not limited to education policy makers, compositionists, writing program administrators, and writing center directors. Because findings make visible the effects of standardization on tutors' and students' work, agency, and identities, this study reinforces scholars' assertions that tutors' and writers' work together has the potential to change writing instruction (Bruffee, 1994; Kail, 1983). Naming those demands, which they too attempt to meet as students, led tutors to also name the hegemonies underpinning those demands. Tutors pointed to the degree to which certain demands work for or against some student groups. The

strategies tutors described using illustrate tutors' attempts to change their and others' discursive practices and point to ways knowledge that tutors and students co-construct makes its way back to classrooms and discourse communities.

Tutors' stories enrich the composition and writing center fields' understanding of the degree to which writing center work preserves or disrupts a social order that is created by standardization. Tutors' critical insights show how writers conform to or subvert standardized notions of academic writing. Through their own narratives about how they've been affected by standardized writing instruction and assessment, tutors consider and reveal the effects of hegemony on their own educational lives.

Reflecting on what they have learned as writers and tutors offers those who teach writing or study students' composing processes the opportunity to see how standard instructional and assessment practices impact students' agency in their own learning. As I illustrate in the Implications section of Chapter Five, this study will inform writing program administrators, composition teachers, and researchers who study composition instruction and assessment in ways that could lead to improvements in the system of composition instruction and, therefore, teaching and learning. Because this study also presents writing centers and writing center tutors as viable research partners capable of leading research efforts in matters of concern to the composition field, this study will engage writing center scholars with others in the composition field who diligently fight for control and responsibility for student-centered composition instruction.

Design of the Study

This study relies on the written and spoken narratives provided by 56 tutors (28 undergraduate, 27 graduate student, and one Ph.D.) employed by post-secondary writing centers in 16 institutions across 10 regions of the United States. Tutors from community colleges, colleges, and universities were among the participants.

Seventeen small group conversations with 53 tutors were held between October 2007 and May 2009. Those conversations were semi-structured interviews. I started the conversation with one question and asked two follow up questions of each group. When necessary, I asked other questions to clarify or extend comments made during the conversation. I interviewed tutors in face-to-face, small group sessions on-site at two conferences or on their college campuses. One interview was a phone interview. The remaining interviews were held online using Dell Chat Video, Gizmo, and Skype. I recorded and transcribed all interviews and treated them as narratives. I later coded these narratives in a manner consistent with a process described by narrative theorists Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The first stage involved reading and re-reading the transcripts and narratives to glean “what there is” (p. 131). This included identifying the context for each piece, the participants, and the topics explored. Clandinin and Connelly assert that the second stage of analysis is much more complicated than often believed:

A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts....With narrative analytic terms in mind, narrative inquirers begin to *narratively code* their field texts. ...[A]ctions,

events...story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear are all possible codes. As narrative researchers engage in this work, they begin to hold different field texts in relation to other field texts. (p. 131)

I collected and triangulated three pieces of data: the interviews/narratives, a self-assessment inventory, and an e-mailed narrative. I coded the interviews for concepts found in the interview and research questions and identified emergent themes. Data from the self-assessment inventory and e-mailed narrative responses were compared to those themes. Further detail about the methods I used to collect and analyze the data can be found in Chapter Three.

Key Terms

Peer Tutor

Circulating among the writing center field are several terms that are used to refer to undergraduate and graduate students who tutor writing, including but not limited to tutor, consultant, and coach. For purposes of this study, I use peer tutor and tutor interchangeably to refer to undergraduate and graduate students with paid positions in college and university writing centers. No professional tutors participated in this study. I also use Bruffee's concept of "knowledgeable peer" to describe the work and subjectivity position of peer tutors and borrow from his application of social constructionist theory to describe the collaborative learning potential between peer tutor and writer during writing center conferences.

Discourse/Discursive Practice

My references to discourse and discursive practice in this study stem from several scholars' notions of the interconnection among language, thought, action, and identity. Using Vygotsky's (1981) notions of language as mind tool, activity theorists define language as a mechanism through which members act in order to complete tasks and identify with the communities they inhabit (Havnes, 2004; David & Victor, 2002). Through spoken and written narratives, tutors identified the institutional demands they saw imposed on the writers who sought their help. They described how they tried to help students negotiate those demands with personal goals for writing. Finally, they identified how those demands affect the agency and identities of tutors and students. A critical question answered by this study is how tutors' reflections might now inform conversations of reform held within the wider composition community. In that sense, this study treats tutors' narrative reflections as mechanisms from which others may learn about the influence of the dominant, institutionalized Discourse (Gee, 2005) on tutors' and students' discursive practices. Because narratives carry a performative quality (Haswell & Lu, 2000), tutors' narratives then become artifacts to which readers in the composition and writing center fields may respond and then act.

That action is an important part of how I define discourse in this study. Kamler (2001) believed that discursive practice involves both language and social action. Her narrative research sought to connect social action to critical readings of personal narratives. Kamler's view points to the potential for writing center tutors' narratives to lead to action within the composition and writing center fields, which I

discuss in Chapter Five. Her view is also similar to Gee's (2005) who held that "investigating how different social languages are used and mixed is one tool of inquiry for engaging in discourse analysis" (p. 20). Though my study does not offer thorough critical discourse analysis, it does explore the words tutors use to critically describe institutional demands and their effects on writers. I will consider those words evidence of the influence of the cultural norms and institutional demands for writing on tutors' and students' work, agency, and identities and treat them as another "social language" tutors and students use during the writing center session. The words tutors use to define institutional demands for writing will point to their knowledge of the language of the institution (the "big D" discourse). Their recognition of how other students refer and respond to those demands is important, as well. That said, what tutors say about institutional demands makes visible the "social language" of tutors and students, and that language is important to any discussion of reform. Gee describes the interaction of the language of the institution and the language of the individual when he writes:

When 'little d' discourse (language-in-use) is melded integrally with non-language 'stuff' to enact specific identities and activities, then I say that 'big D' Discourses are involved. We are all members of many, a great many, different Discourses, Discourses which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes breed with each other to create new hybrids....you use language and 'other stuff'—ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects, symbols, tools,

and technologies—to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways. In turn, you produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given ‘form of life’ or Discourse. (p. 7)

What Gee describes is what writing center tutors and students do during writing center sessions. Through conversations with other tutors in my study, each tutor engaged in Gee’s notion of recognition work. While “trying to make visible” what and who they are, tutors “[recognized] others for who they are and what they are doing” (p. 29). Important to this recognition work is how tutors used language to “[take] on a certain identity or role...” (p. 11).

Though this study did not attempt a thorough analysis of tutors’ discourse, it did give tutors an opportunity to critically reflect on institutional demands for writing and their effects on their and students’ work. In doing so, tutors added to the grand narrative written about standardized instruction and assessment by those who oppose and defend standardization. For this study, I borrowed from Giroux’s definition of the grand narrative, which he ties to the language of educational policy and its role in reinforcing hegemonies, particularly those that are racist and classist. Giroux’s strident criticism of educational policy shows how “languages of simplistic correspondence fail to provide an awareness of one’s biographical, ideological, and historical situatedness” (1993, p. 3). As I discuss later in Chapter Five, tutors’ narratives afforded them the opportunity to add that level of situatedness that Giroux advocates.

Institutionalized Demands

This study explores tutors' perceptions of how standards for writing affect their and other students' work, agency, and identities. Trimbur (1987) acknowledged that writing center tutors must often undo what they were taught to do prior to attending college or university. Trimbur's suggestion points to a reality that tutors and writers face when they enter post-secondary classrooms. Both tutor and writer arrive trained in the conventions of good writing only to have to reconcile those with new standards, new expectations. Among the old and new standards are those that are explicitly stated, as well as those they must infer. The old and new standards become part of the D/discourses writing center tutors and writers use during their conversations in the writing center.

This study was not designed to encourage tutors to view standardization as either boon or threat to teaching and learning. For some tutors, the very word "standard" may carry a negative connotation. If I were to ask tutors to define the "standards" they see imposed upon the writers they help, they might have limited their answers to what they can see in writing (from professors, departments, universities, credentialing or accrediting bodies, professional groups, or textbooks and handbooks) and leave out those standards they infer from contact with individuals, communities, higher education, and society. They may have only referred to those standards they feel are unfair or even threatening to students. Furthermore, my institutional status and authority (as researcher, composition teacher, and writing center professional) may have led them to offer answers they thought would please me. To avoid those possible limitations, I decided to use a more neutral term

“institutional demands,” which I borrowed from Marilyn Cooper’s (1994/2008) “Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers.”

Throughout my discussion, however, I refer to *standards* and *institutional demands* for writing interchangeably because of their relationship to one another. Standards for writing are rooted in societal, historical, political, cultural, and religious ideologies, and those ideologies compel institutions to adopt standards for teaching and learning. Gee (2005) noted how “language and institutions ‘bootstrap’ each other into existence in a reciprocal process through time” (p. 10). Tutors and writers come to the writing center having participated in that process. Each group is familiar with conventional standards and cultural norms for writing. The focus of this study goes beyond tutors’ knowledge of those standards to raise questions about tutors’ and students’ relationships with standards. What institutional demands are imposed upon tutors and the writers who seek their help? How do those demands affect tutors’ and students’ work, agency, and identities? What might tutors’ and students’ experiences with standards add to the conversation about standardization’s effects on teaching and learning?

Negotiation

Attached to the term *negotiation* are varying degrees of meaning. For purposes of this study, I return to Cooper (1994/2008) who wrote that tutors must help writers “negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs” (p. 140). In pointing to a potentially contentious relationship between institutional demands and individual needs, Cooper complicates negotiation to more closely align with the work that writing center tutors do. That is, negotiation means more than simply

navigating and finding one's way through unfamiliar territory. During a writing center session, the act of negotiation is a complex process, requiring agency by both tutor and writer in the process and the outcome. Collaboration is a hallmark of this process. Both tutor and writer work together through the writing or a portion of the writing process. They draw from what they each know from the cultural norms of writing instruction and from their lived experiences to co-construct new knowledge. This collaborative work affords tutor and writer agency in the negotiation process. Increased agency nurtures ownership of and responsibility for the work that results. Agency leads to action. In order for a tutor to help a writer negotiate between outside demands and personal goals for writing, both tutor and writer need to be aware that choosing one does not exclude the other. Tutors' reflections point to both tutors' and students' attempts to make those decisions.

Narratives

Trimmer (1997), Haswell and Lu (2000), and Pagnucci (2004) all model the value of narratives in transforming composition scholarship and composition pedagogy. Their work informed my understanding of how narratives function in this study. Though narratives are often criticized as unverifiable and unreliable in serious scholarship, Trimmer (1997) dispels that criticism by describing a narrative as “a way of making Knowledge” (p. xii). Haswell and Lu's (2000) collection show the value of narratives to “define and redefine relations and issues central to the [composition] field” and “to examine and change established knowledges and practices” among its participants (p. x). They go on to note that a narrative's performative value lies in what readers do with the information the narrative presents. Pagnucci (2004) also

acknowledges the importance of narrative to research and teaching when he says that “stories connect what we know to what we’re trying to understand. They make things personal, give things meaning. They make things matter” (p. 9). Chapter Five offers several excerpts from tutors’ narratives. Those excerpts bring tutors’ voices to the forefront of my discussion where others might interpret them and learn from them.

Narratives serve both public and private functions. I chose to use narratives as the primary data in this study to allow tutors the opportunity to co-construct new meaning from their experiences with institutional demands for writing. Describing narratives as “pieces that use the personal background, experiences, and perceptions...in critical ways,” Herrington notes their value in “making public what could be taken as private for professional purposes” (as cited in Brandt et al., 2001, p. 49). Herrington’s point reinforces the performative quality of narratives recognized by Haswell and Lu (2000) and one of the benefits to tutors who participated in this study. Because narratives can be used for liberatory purposes, writing and sharing narratives empowered the tutors to identify and critically analyze institutional demands for writing and their effects on students. Their critical reflections allowed tutors the opportunity “to subvert traditional political and cultural associations relating to personal achievement” (Spigelman, 2001, p. 65).

Few writing center scholars refer to the value of narratives to writing center research. In 2008, as I gathered the second round of tutor narratives for my study, Nancy Grimm published an article, “Attending to the Conceptual Change Potential of Writing Center Narratives,” in *The Writing Center Journal*. Prior to that, however, few writing center scholars spoke to how the field might use narratives as a means to

“learn about how systems function and how individuals are positioned and understood within those systems” (Grimm, 2008, p. 5). Like Grimm, Nancy Welch (2002) found that narratives offer tutors a transitional space through which they “rewrite prior perspectives found to be incomplete, not always or entirely true” (pp. 208-209). Though tutor training manuals have carried articles written by writing center tutors on a range of important topics (Rafoth, 2005; Bruce & Rafoth, 2009), only one collection, Briggs and Woolbright’s (2000) *Stories from the Center* connects narrative theory with writing center work. In their introduction, Briggs and Woolbright point to how narratives allowed their authors to “speak things otherwise unspeakable, to give voice to that which would otherwise go unheard” (p. xi).

My study builds on that goal by offering writing center tutors the opportunity to “give voice” to students’ experiences with institutional demands for writing. Tutors’ narratives present specific information about what standards they see imposed upon writers and how they help writers negotiate those standards with personal needs for writing. Tutors’ perspectives add students’ voices to compositionists’ conversations on reform and best practices. Narratives point to how tutors’ work is framed by the Discourse of standardized writing instruction and assessment, and they show how tutors and writers attempt to co-construct and reframe that Discourse. Using narratives as the primary source data in this study allowed tutors to name how the Discourse bears down on their and students’ work. Tutors’ narratives also show how they work with writers (and other tutors) to co-construct knowledge and identities for themselves within systems against which they struggle.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation offers readers what is traditionally found in an empirical study: an examination of findings related to a set of primary research questions, a review of the literature, a plan for data collection and analysis, a preview of results, discussion of findings, and, appropriately, an acknowledgment that more work can and should be done. Chapter Two offers a review of the literature. Chapter Three traces the methods by which I conducted this study. Chapter Four illustrates the results from analysis of the triangulated data, which shows marked consistencies across tutors' answers and across institutions in 10 regions of the United States. The consistencies pertain to the nature of institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment with which students struggle; how those demands manifest in professors' assignments and grading practices; how undergraduate and graduate students react to those demands; and how tutors attempt to steer students away from product-oriented approaches to teaching and assessing writing and back toward process and global concerns evident in students' papers. Chapter Five is a discussion of the results where I will situate the findings of this study among discussions held in both the composition and writing center fields and show how this study's findings point to how tutors' and students' insights can be used to effect curricular reforms. In that chapter, I also suggest potential uses and extensions of this research in the composition and writing center fields.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

[We] recognize in writing center teaching the absolute frontier of our discipline. It is in writing centers that two seminal ideas of our reborn profession operate most freely: the student-centered curriculum, and a central concern for composing as a process. And it is in these centers that great new discoveries will be, are being, made: ways of teaching composition, intervening in it, changing it. Writing centers provide, in short, opportunities for teaching and research that classrooms simply cannot offer. (Brannon and North, 1980, p. 1)

In introducing this study, I theorized a term, *vernacular architecture*, which I borrowed from the architectural design field in order to call attention to the role writing center tutors play as unacknowledged “architects” in composition instruction. As such, a tutor “models the very ways through which knowledge is constructed in the academy” (Kail, 2008, p. 3). Their conversations with students are marked by the language they have internalized through their membership in various discourse communities (Bordieu, 1991; Bruffee, 1984b; Gee, 2005), including the language of writing instruction and assessment, namely the institutionalized demands for writing in the academy. Tutors’ dual status as tutor and student—a part of and apart from the institution and individuals who impose those demands—qualifies them as experts on the effects of those demands on students’ work, identity, and agency in ways that have yet to be recognized by those who have long decried the effects of standardization on teaching and learning. This includes the writing center field. While

several writing center scholars argue that a tutor's role is to disrupt the status quo of standardization, the bulk of the literature written about tutoring idealizes tutors and is written *about* tutors rather than with or by them (Boquet, 2000). Rather than treat students' voices as mere shadows, this study seeks to spotlight tutors' "struggle to articulate" the hegemonies that underlie their work (Knoblauch, 1988, p. 125) by engaging them in a study of their own praxis (Freire, 1970/2005). In conversation with other tutors—in their own words—participants in my study become research partners who, together, define the demands they see imposed upon the students who seek their help; who recount their and others' struggles against those demands; and who describe the strategies they use to help students negotiate those demands with their own personal goals for writing.

This chapter shows how my study responds to scholars' requests for more research into how standardization affects writers' agency and identities. I extend Brannon and North's (1980) reference to writing centers as *frontiers* for substantive research to situate my writing center study within the composition field. I will extend that frontier metaphor to describe writing centers as vernacular sites and their role within the history of standardization of curriculum and instruction. I justify my study by pointing to what other writing center scholars have said about the relationship between expectations for writing and students' agency in their own learning. I end with a discussion of the epistemology of peer tutoring and present tutors as a knowledge community (Bruffee, 1984a, 1995) whose discursive practices reflect the institutional demands for writing on students' work, agency, and identities.

Writing Centers as Research Sites

The conversations between writing center tutors and students offer researchers access to students' constructions of knowledge about writing and about themselves as writers that cannot be found in the classroom. This study engages writing center tutors as research partners in an exploration of institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment: what those demands are, where or why they originate, and what happens when students struggle to meet them. Tutors' critical perspectives substantiate many of the claims made by those in the composition, education, and writing center fields who rally against standardization. More importantly, tutors' voices add students' signatures to a grand narrative written to benefit them but one in which they remain silent and objectified (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

When Brannon and North launched *The Writing Center Journal* over 25 years ago, they did so with "high hopes for the 'great new discoveries' about the learning and teaching of writing to be discovered through writing center research" (Gillespie, Gillam, Falls Brown, & Stay, 2002, p. xv). As several scholars have noted since, however, Brannon and North's ideal has yet to be realized (Lerner, 2003a, 2003b; Grimm, 1992, 2003; Villanueva, 2006; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2007). What has remained constant is the confusion as to what writing centers do (Leahy, 1990; Lerner, 2003b; Boquet, 2002). Gillam (2002) credited Brannon and North for encouraging acceptance of the writing center as a legitimate site for research into students' composing processes. She also credited them for drawing attention to what the writing center field could offer the composition field: "'great new discoveries' about the two 'seminal ideas' that define composition as a

discipline: ‘the student-centered curriculum’ and ‘concern for composing as a process’” (Brannon & North cited in Gillam, 2002, p. 6). This study engages writing center tutors as research partners in the exploration and discovery of some of the consequences of institutionalized instruction and assessment on writers’ work, agency, and identities.

The frontier metaphor, in particular, suggested the potential of writing center research to offer the type of naturalistic inquiry into writers’ composing processes that the classroom could not offer. That goal has proven hard to achieve. As Gillam (2000) acknowledged:

this frontier status is geographically determined by the writing center’s relationship to the larger field...of composition. On the one hand, this relationship is represented in terms of similarity: Student- and process-centered instruction are central to both writing center and composition studies. (p. 7)

On the other hand is difference. That difference—between the writing center and the writing classroom—lay at the root of writing centers’ identity struggle and threatened the potential of writing center research. North’s (1984) landmark essay “The Idea of a Writing Center,” written for readers of *College English*, reinforced the differences between the composition classroom and the writing center. It also secured, at least symbolically, writing centers’ metaphorical, marginalized status within the academy and composition community, a status against which writing center scholars continue to fight (Grimm, 1992; Boquet, 2000; Boquet, 2002). Boquet and Lerner (2008) summarize North’s thesis in this way:

North's basic message is as follows: English department colleagues have long relegated writing center work to the margins of the discipline, as well as physically placed them in dank basements and windowless cubbies. As a result, the full potential of writing centers as 'centers of consciousness' for writing has yet to be realized. (p. 170)

Boquet and Lerner then go on to show how the writing center field's uncritical acceptance of North's *idea* further distanced the field from the larger composition community and limited the potential for writing centers to become the *frontier* that Brannon and North envisioned:

"Idea" ... has limited the work we see in [*The Writing Center Journal*] that North, with Lil Brannon, shepherded into existence in 1980. And more powerfully, this loyalty has limited the reach of writing center scholarship beyond those basement walls that North decries. We assert that the writing center readers' reception of North's "Idea" has become an intellectual position that often substitutes for collective action and rigorous scholarship. (Boquet & Lerner, 2008, p. 171)

Writing center practitioners' unchecked devotion to North's "Idea," then, created for the field an epistemology championed only within the writing center community, "a kind of verbal shorthand, a special handshake for the initiated, an endpoint rather than the origin" (Boquet and Lerner, 2008, p. 171).

My study invokes Brannon and North's vision and moves the expertise of the writing center field back out into the composition community where writing centers might serve as viable research partners. Moreover, my study presents peer tutors as

researchers whose expertise and dual institutional roles as tutor and student means they can speak to the conditions that affect students' literacy lives and successes in ways that faculty cannot. Boquet (2000) described tutors as extensions of the institution when she wrote:

[w]riting tutors perhaps more than any other students in the university, are the students who have mastered the discourse and internalized the ideology of the institution. To the students they work with, tutors embody the university's ideal. So it is only fitting that those same tutors, often unknowingly, serve as the instruments through which that discourse is enforced. (p. 25)

Despite tutors (and students') distinct knowledge of the effects of institutionalized literacy standards, scholars rarely engage students in discussions of how their literacy lives are affected by myriad conditions, including those mentioned by tutors: historical, social, economic, and political factors; theoretical, curricular, and epistemological approaches to writing instruction and assessment; disciplinary hierarchies, traditions, and conventions; an institution's reputation and branding; an individual's class, race, culture, language, ethnicity, gender, and sex. Over time, students become aware of how these conditions point to institutionalized beliefs about what and who is valued in the classroom, and though students may never articulate their awareness, their work and identities are affected. As Boquet (2000) acknowledged, this also holds true for writing center tutors.

Writing Centers as Vernacular Sites

Like other vernacular habitats, writing centers are spaces (re)shaped, over time, by those who use them. Envision an old school building subdivided into

separate living spaces. Over time, changes in the community, in building codes, and building materials led to the reuse and redesign of the school building. After renovation, the building's original foundation and structure, size, and certain design elements still clearly indicate the building's original purpose as a school: The school's motto may still be etched in the stonework above the main entry. A cornerstone may indicate a building date. The brickwork may reflect masonry craft reminiscent of a particular time period, a craft now obsolete. While signs of the building's former life appear in these and other details, interior details reveal decisions made by the inhabitants to make the space more suitable for their contemporary lives. Studying those details leads to an understanding of how the past, present and future relate to one another.

The same holds true for writing centers. As conditions change outside in the wider composition community (Brannon and North's frontier), writing centers adapt to serve the intellectual, physical, and emotional needs of students. When the vernacular architecture model is applied to the study of what happens within writing centers, it is easy to attribute those changes to changes within the institution and to the hegemonies that shape teaching and learning. Writing center tutors are, by virtue of their paid positions in the writing center, agents of the hegemonies that underlie expectations for "good writing." Like their peers, they come to the writing center having internalized the dominant discourse models they learned in school, and they draw upon those models to obviate failure. Part of tutor training often asks tutors to reflect on their own expectations of student writers and of what their role is in helping

them to improve as writers. It is believed that when they do so, tutors have the potential to disrupt if not redesign those expectations.

Lunsford (1991/2008) once described writing centers as “Burkean Parlors for collaboration” whose potential lay in “changing the face of higher education” (p. 52). Unprompted during an interview, Silvana, who tutors at Heartland University, used Lunsford’s metaphor to acknowledge that not much of what a tutor or student talk about during a writing center session is new: “It has all been said before,” she claimed. “We are adding to a conversation that has been taking place without us for so long.” To borrow from narrative inquiry, this tutor acknowledges that both tutor and writer enter that conversation in the midst of its happening on what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as a long-term narrative landscape dotted by the influences of home, community, school, and institutions. To envision that narrative landscape moves us toward recognizing writing centers as vernacular sites where tutors’ and students’ conversations not only embody the effects of educational acculturation (or what is) but also shifts the focus to how those conversations signal a reacculturation (or what could be).

That reacculturation, Bruffee (1994) held, could effect change in the composition classroom and, as Lunsford suggested, higher education. Just as teachers could be viewed as “agents of cultural change” (Bruffee, para. 15) in their classrooms, so too could writing center tutors be trusted to create change in writers’ lives. Writers then would take their new knowledge, new identities, and newfound sense of agency in their own learning back to the classroom and, through

collaborative learning with peers, transform composition instruction. The process is messy but constructive. Kail (1983) described it as

not lineal but recursive, the complex syntax of peer tutoring turns back on itself in a series of infinite loops of influence; cause and effect, teaching and learning chase each other around and around; and students and teachers through the locus of the writing lab find themselves to some degree bound up in a wholly new institutional relationship. (p. 598)

These scholars point to the promise of peer tutoring to create institutional change. Their views also reinforce my claim that tutors are the unacknowledged “architects” of composition instruction.

Standardization and the Role of Writing Centers

Changes to composition instruction and assessment over the course of writing centers’ one-hundred year history have undoubtedly determined the role writing centers play on secondary and post-secondary campuses. Historically, composition instructors and their students have fallen under increased control of institutional and disciplinary expectations, federal education policies, accrediting agencies’ standards, textbook companies’ curricula, and ever-shrinking finances. This study acknowledges that what happens in composition classrooms is affected by more powerful forces outside them, and those forces affect the work of writing centers. But it also presents writing centers as sites where we might study the effects of those forces on students’ learning. In an address to attendees of the Midwest Writing Centers Association regional conference in 2007, Kathleen Blake Yancey described the writing center as the one site on campus to which college students return throughout their college

career. Thus, the promise of writing centers lies in their engagement of students in the practice of their public and private literacies—academic and otherwise. To others in the composition field, the promise of writing centers lies in their liberatory potential of their pedagogies (North, 1984; Boquet, 2000; Grimm, 1992; Villanueva, 2006). Thus, when viewed as credible sites for inquiry into how students negotiate curricular demands placed before them, writing centers become key to understanding how students take what they know about writing and themselves from the many communities to which they belong, and, to varying degrees, accept, adapt, or resist the rules set before them.

Among scholars who study composition instruction are those who have criticized standardized writing instruction and assessment for their negative effects on teaching and learning and for further marginalizing students by race, class, culture, and linguistic background (Hillocks, 2002; Huot, 2002, 2007; Holdstein, 2002; Broad, 2003; Matsuda, 2006; Villanueva, 2006). While much of this scholarship offers rationales for why those who teach should help craft policy, there is little discussion of how students' perspectives might help. In addition, while the scholarship offers generalizations about the consequences of invalid and unreliable measurements of students' academic success, it fails to make visible the effects of standardization and high-stakes testing on the students' discursive practices and identities.

Writing centers are rarely mentioned in composition scholarship by those who decry the effects of standardization on teaching and learning. Huot (2007) refers to Lerner's histories of writing centers' liberal leanings toward underprepared students.

Huot, who tutored and acted as assistant director in two university writing centers for eight years, told me that his reference to writing centers in that article stemmed from his observations of intelligence testing, which he called a more “conservative approach to mandates for universal education [than writing centers] at the turn of the century” (personal communication, February 27, 2008). Unlike Huot, Hillocks (2002) does not mention writing centers at all in his study of the early effects of NCLB on teaching and learning in the K-12 schools that he observed in seven states. Broad (2003) makes only brief mention of writing centers in his study of what post-secondary instructors value in students’ papers. He found that writing centers were listed as a contextual criterion used by his participants to rate a student’s success or failure on benchmark essays; essays rife with mechanical errors were presumably written by students who chose not to avail themselves of the writing center’s help. Subsequently, those essays (and those students) failed. Broad encouraged further research into the writing center’s role in students’ composing processes.

Villanueva (2006), another advocate of writing centers, emphatically encouraged writing center scholarship that fought against policies that pointed to a “new racism,” one based on nationalism and preservation of social and economic rank. Citing Grimm (1992), Villanueva wrote:

“[W]riting center workers must be prepared to offer more compelling and more socially just visions of literacy to counteract the simplistic understandings that lend themselves to social ranking rather than communication.” [Grimm’s] right. It’s you, after all, who do the most important teaching—the one-with-one. (46)

Villanueva's reference to writing centers is important to this study because he acknowledges writing center tutors as educators. He not only qualifies them to enter but to lead those scholarly conversations about standardized instruction and assessment. He upholds the potential for tutors and students (the one-with-one) to engage in collaborative and critical examination of racist, classist, and other ideologies tied to literacy education.

Peer Tutors as Vernacular Architects

Writing tutors, perhaps more than any other students in the university, are the students who have mastered the discourse and internalized the ideology of the institution. To the students they work with, tutors embody the university's ideal. So it is only fitting that those same tutors, often unknowingly, serve as the instruments through which that discourse is enforced. (Boquet, 2000, p. 25)

Writing centers have long been idealized as sites where students might disrupt the status quo and subsequent social order created by attempts to standardize writers. This study recognizes that ideal. It also presents tutors and students as the unacknowledged experts on the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment. Tutors' dual status—as tutor and student—means they are not only a subject of the institution that imposes standard demands for writing on students but also the object of the institution's actions. As students, tutors grapple with the same demands for writing imposed upon the writers who seek their help. They, too, must work within the epistemological and intellectual structures defined for them as students and as aspiring members of their chosen disciplinary communities. Yet

students' voices are often left out of conversations held among scholars about the effects of standardization on teaching and learning. This study explores writing center tutors' ideas about how institutional demands for writing affect students' work, agency, and identities and adds students' voices to scholars' conversations about those effects. This study presumes that tutors' reflections will provide for the composition community "both a narrative for agency as well as a referent for critique" of those effects (Giroux, 1987, p. 10).

While the writing center has long been hailed as a logical site for studying "how language and subjectivity intersect with history, power, and authority" (Giroux & McLaren, 1992, p. 8), the field's literature remains largely marked by objective reports of tutors' and students' experiences, a reality noted by Boquet nearly a decade ago. "Tutors," Boquet writes, "are often objectified and essentialized in the literature devoted to them. In this way, tutors are disallowed a voice in the literature that pertains most directly to them" (2000, p. 18). Her words appeared in Briggs & Woolbright's *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*, which is the only book-length collection of essays that connect narrative theory with writing center work. The collection includes narratives "in which authors wrote about lived experiences and reflected on those experiences in terms of current theory" (Briggs & Woolbright, 2000, p. x). Ironically, Boquet's criticism could be pointed back at the very collection in which her essay appeared; though many of the contributors' own experience as tutors informed their writing, the book's back matter identifies all but one contributor as teaching faculty.

Jukuri (2000) is the lone student tutor who appears as a contributor in that collection. He borrows from Foucault when he acknowledges what other writing center scholars know to be true: the tutor's "first" voice is always that of the Institution (p. 60). The second voice that tutors invoke is one of Inclination, a voice that attempts to liberate writers from literacy and language conventions with which they struggle. Jukuri describes these two voices as polar opposites that signal subject positions socially constructed from outside the center and, more specifically, from outside the conversation held between tutor and student. He admits that when he tutors, he is at "constant risk of falling completely into one or the other" (p. 60); consequently, he seeks a third voice that permits him to pull from the various discourses and subject positions he occupies, whether that means helping a student become critically aware of what they are asked to do (to possibly reject it), or helping a student master conventions expected in the discourse communities to which they seek access. What Jukuri's essay points to is the contradiction inherent in peer tutoring observed by Trimbur (1987). It raises questions about the degree to which peer tutors help to liberate students from the institutional demands for writing imposed upon them. Jukuri's narrative also suggests that tutors can choose to critically examine literacy conventions and their own subjectivities, but to do so is hard work. As Boquet (2000) warns, notions of the "ideal" tutor often prevail, an ideal framed by the voice of the institution. In her narrative, Boquet laments her own compliance with that voice:

I kept quiet and helped the student as best I could to perform the tasks required of him within the confines of the class. At the time, I justified my

actions by reminding myself that the ‘ideal’ tutor is to be neither a student-advocate nor a teacher-advocate. Rather, my job as a tutor was to help Michael learn to operate within constraints of his rhetorical context. And the instructor, obviously, was a large part of that context. (p. 22)

Tutors cannot help but to “implicate [themselves] in institutional silence” (Rogers & Statler, 2000, p. 80). Like Boquet, Rogers and Statler (2000), admit to times when they fell short of helping writers to disrupt “centripetal, hierarchizing forces,” a role they felt they had an ethical responsibility as writing center tutors to perform (p. 75). As experienced tutors come to know, silencing their “institutional” voices is a task easier to idealize than to enact. The same is true for students.

Like their peers, tutors are keenly aware of the power behind that institutional voice. Grimm (1999) envisions writing center workers who have a critical awareness of the power they hold and avoid serving as gatekeepers to any system that preserves social ranking. Applying Street’s notions of ideological literacy to the work that could be done in writing centers, Grimm advocates a less subtractive view of students and increased attention to the institutional systems that perpetuate that view. She suggests that writing center workers be trained to recognize that “literacy practices are cultural rather than natural” (p. 33). In *Tutoring Writing* (2001), a seminal book about peer tutoring, McAndrew and Reigstad echo Grimm’s observation of culture’s effect on writers’ language. They write, “Writers and writing exist within a culture and use a language created by that culture; that is, writers and writing both produce and are a product of wider social and political realities” (p. 23). They go on to name collaboration, writing, and peer tutoring as political acts that carry great potential for

helping to disrupt the hierarchies of learning environments, curriculum and instruction, and assessment. Several of my participants acknowledged that it was not only possible but important—through peer tutoring—to help writers develop an awareness of those hierarchies and culture’s influence on language and literacy practices.

However, not all agreed that students were victims to those systems. As one noted, choosing to comply with standards that supercede personal goals for writing is still a choice; it was time for the field to view those students who choose to comply as more than victims to their institutional circumstances. What this and other tutors seemed to suggest is that critical pedagogies may, indeed, make tutors and students aware of the hegemonies that undergird the expectations imposed upon writers, but the pedagogies themselves do not ensure that writers won’t return to the safety of what they know will be rewarded: the voice of the institution.

Peer Tutors’ Praxis and Agency

Several writing center directors engage their tutors in examination of what Freire (1970) referred to as “praxis.” The influence of Freirean and Gramscian thought on the composition and writing center fields is undeniable. While this section does not attempt an exhaustive review of that literature, I would like to present the perceptions of scholars from outside the writing center field whose work in composition and critical literacy studies influenced writing center pedagogy and scholarship.

Cy Knoblauch may never have worked in a writing center, but his collaboration with Lil Brannon and connection to Stephen North and others who later

published in the writing center field warrants at least a brief mention of his work. Of particular relevance to my study is Knoblauch's application of Freire's notions of praxis to rhetorical theory, which he defines as "a field of statements pertaining to language, knowledge, and discourse" (p. 126). Knoblauch set out to "probe...some philosophical issues that teaching and thinking about teaching regularly bring to mind," including, among others, "the relationship between intellectual argument ('reflection') and teaching practice ('action')" and "the conflict between dialogue (the free, collective examination of choices) and commitment (the decision to act)" (p. 125). Borrowing from Freire, Knoblauch posited that "names" given to aspects of education were often developed uncritically; this consequently suspends dialogue, favors dominant worldviews, and creates oppressive learning environments. He acknowledges that teachers are not necessarily victims of this process but conscious decision makers whose actions in the classrooms stem from their own expertise about the methods that help students achieve. Knoblauch called for the critical and reflective naming of those "aims, assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, consciously or unconsciously sustained," adding that to do so would "allow them to be analyzed, supported, opposed, and changed, so that teaching itself changes deliberately in accordance with altered judgments of its means and ends" (p. 129). This naming that Knoblauch advocates is precisely the type of naming Villanueva and Grimm call for and that tutors in this study provide.

Villanueva (1993) takes up Freirean and Gramscian thought in *Bootstraps*, a book often cited in writing center scholarship. Villanueva wrote,

At the heart of Freire's work is *conscientizacao*, 'critical consciousness'.

Critical consciousness is the recognition that society contains social, political, and economic conditions which are at odds with the individual will to freedom. When that recognition is given voice, and a decision is made to do something about the contradiction between the individual and society's workings against individual freedom, even if the action is no more than critical reflection, there is *praxis*. (1993, p. 54, author's emphasis)

Villanueva goes on to explain that the outcome of that praxis is that students realize that "nothing is value-free, that all is in one way or another political, is always affected by and affecting their conduct as citizens of the various communities they travel within and through" (p. 55). He brings in Gramsci's concept of the "organic intellectual" who becomes "the voice of the oppressed class of which they are a part" (p. 58), a "conscious user of language" (p. 59). Gramsci's influence on the composition and writing center fields is appropriate. Gilyard (2008) finds it so "because schooling is an aspect of civil society tied directly to the issue of hegemony. When compositionists speak of dominant discourses and counter-hegemonic linguistic practices..., they are echoing Gramscian sentiments" (p. 17).

In 1994, Cooper used Gramsci's concept to describe writing center tutors. Cooper's calling writing center tutors organic intellectuals is appropriate. Tutors, along with the students they tutor, use language to negotiate the discourse expectations placed upon them, to examine them, to question, them, and to disrupt them, if they so choose. That negotiation requires both features of praxis: both

naming and reflection (Freire, 1970). When tutors and students engage in praxis, agency in their own learning increases.

According to Cooper (1994/2008), chief among the central questions of writing center research should be the role of the writing center tutor in composition instruction, especially in nurturing agency among student writers. Like Grimm, whom Cooper acknowledges as having influenced her own research agenda, Cooper saw writing centers as potential critics of institutionalized power over students. She described tutors as organic intellectuals who work “to elaborate critically and systematically the philosophy of their social group” (p. 61). As organic intellectuals, writing center tutors were more well suited to nurture students’ agency in their own learning than the traditional intellectuals (teachers, scholars, administrators) whose subject position was too far removed from the social group they controlled (students). Within this conceptual framework, Cooper viewed agency as more than the student’s attempt to control their assignments:

...what this comes down to is that tutors can best help students become agents of their own writing by helping them understand how and the extent to which they are *not* owners of their texts and *not* responsible for the shape of their texts, by helping them understand, in short, how various institutional forces impinge on how and what they write and how they can negotiate a place for their own goals and needs when faced with these forces. (p. 58)

She acknowledges tutors’ and students’ own knowledge about what they cannot control, claiming that

all students and tutors know how institutions coerce them in writing classes....

Students know that in order to get a good grade they must carefully follow assignments that specify these things, and tutors are advised explicitly not to criticize or in any way try to subvert teachers' assignments. Students and tutors respond—quite rationally—by trying to make the papers match as perfectly as possible the specifications of assignments while at the same time—quite irrationally—trying to believe that in doing this students are asserting ownership over their texts and learning to write. (p. 59)

Cooper implicates the dominant Discourses of the classroom, the composition and writing center fields, and the textbook publishing industry in this coercion. She then goes on to explain that “Agency in writing is not a matter of simply taking up the subject positions offered by assignments but of actively constructing subject positions that negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs” (p. 59). Cooper claims that when students' agency increases, so too does “useful knowledge about writing,” and that knowledge held the key to transforming writing pedagogy (p. 59).

Rodby's (2002) examination of the conversation between tutor and student during a writing center session points to the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. She writes, “writing and response to writing are effects of ideology's calling (through discourse)” (p. 224). She noted that tutors and writers are at once “many subjects” whose “subjectivities seldom cohere” (p. 222). As a result, the relationships between and among the tutors' and students' subjectivities complicate their conversations. McAndrew and Reigstad (2001) described this process as circular:

writers and writing exist within a culture and use a language created by that culture; that is, writers and writing both produce and are a product of wider social and political realities. When writers write they use a system of symbols created by the culture. In a circular process, the symbol system itself is used to create the culture as writers create and share meanings in writing. (p. 23)

This recursive process points to the potential for learning as both tutor and writer make choices about which discourse to invoke, given the turns of the conversation and the nature of their responses to the discursive expectations of the writing task. One of those choices is resistance, and with resistance comes agency (Rodby, 2002). Whatever those choices, the very process of praxis through collaborative conversation about writing means those tutors and those students take back to the classroom what they learn within the writing center.

Peer Tutors' Role in the Construction of Knowledge

For nearly four decades, Kenneth Bruffee's concept of peer tutoring as collaborative learning has greatly influenced writing center pedagogy and peer tutoring epistemology. His work informs this study, especially with respect to tutors' and students' co-construction of knowledge. Bruffee borrowed the theory and practice of collaborative learning from the social sciences and developed a model for peer tutoring in both classrooms and writing centers. Of particular relevance is his view of peer tutoring as a collaborative, discursive process through which tutor and student engage in conversation and become "mutual aids" in each other's learning (2008). Also relevant is Bruffee's belief that peer-teaching ultimately shifts responsibility and authority for teaching and learning to the student, thereby

increasing students' agency in their own learning and success as readers and writers. That shift, Bruffee believed, would help transform classroom pedagogies. It would also help students learn "interdependence," a skill they will use beyond their time spent in college classrooms (2008). All of these benefits, Bruffee believed, would help to construct much needed system-wide educational reforms, beginning with writing instruction.

While many scholars firmly state that peer tutoring's social, collaborative praxis improves the conditions through which writers learn to write (Trimbur, 1988; Kail, 2008; Grimm, 1992), that potential is only implied in the leading tutor training manuals. In all of the manuals I reviewed for this study, tutorial conversations are characterized as goal-oriented, collaborative conversations designed to help writers develop as thoughtful writers (Harris, 1986; McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001; Rafoth, 2005; Gillespie & Lerner, 2004; Ryan & Zimmereli, 2006). Other single-authored books on which the field has come to rely also describe the writing conference as a "teaching" conference (Murray, 1985; Gere, 1987; Bishop, 1997; Black, 1998; Bruffee, 2008). The power of the writing center tutorial, then, according to the manuals, lies in helping the writer become a better writer; they do not take on how peer tutoring will reform composition instruction. "If we could tell you only one thing about tutoring," begin Ryan and Zimmerelli (2006) in their popular tutor training manual, "it's that your real task [as a tutor] is to make changes in the way in which students go about writing" (p. ix). They and other manual writers observe how difficult and "political" the tutoring process is (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001). All describe tutoring as rife with complications, ethical considerations, and professional

responsibilities—the same realities that my tutor participants mentioned during our conversations. Though training manuals have been conscientiously revised to help tutors work with racial, cultural, and linguistically diverse students, they rarely discuss what Burlaga (2003) called the “institutional and social concerns” that weigh more heavily on the practice of peer tutoring than writing center theory (p. 1).

Narratives give tutors the opportunity to explore that disjuncture (Welch, 2002). When tutor colleagues and I presented our narratives at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in 2007, Bruffee (who attended our session) told me that we were doing the most important work we could do (personal communication, October 27, 2007): talking about the ways in which tutors make meaning out of the complexities of their jobs. The burden of social concerns weighs heavily on the conversations between tutor and student. One reason is that by its very nature, peer tutoring is a social act. Both tutor and student draw upon their lived experiences from within and outside the classroom when they talk about reading, writing, and other literacies. They draw from their many social languages developed over the years as members of different discourse communities. As they collaborate on a text, they construct for themselves new realities and identities as readers, writers, and other literacy users. They model, according to Kail (2008), the construction of knowledge within the academy. Bruffee (2008) posits,

...we all think, talk, and write in ways that we have learned at some time in our lives in conversation—written, spoken, or in gesture—with other people. We know no other way. And when we talk to each other, write to each other, and read what each other has written, we return the internalized conversation

we call thought to its native element, human social interaction carried on in the socially constructed conventions of language. (pp. 12-13)

Both Bruffee and Kail remind us that peer tutoring is a way of knowing, an epistemology that when enacted illustrates the influence of socially constructed conventions of language on what tutors and students know about writing, about themselves as writers, and about the purpose of writing within the communities to which they belong or hope to join.

My study further justifies research into tutors' discursive practices and what they reveal about that construction. It presumes that the composition field will benefit from knowing how students have internalized the language of the writing classroom, particularly the demands that have become institutionalized over time. Tutors' reflections on their work (as tutors and students) offer more than just a list of demands given for writing assignments. Tutors help the field understand which demands pose particular challenges to writers, which do the most harm to writers' identities, and how—when faced with those challenges—students help each other learn to face them.

Peer Tutoring as a Complex, Discursive Dance

This study presumes that the best way to identify the influence of the institution's voice on tutors' and students' work is to begin by asking the tutors to name the demands they see imposed on the writers who seek their help. Using Vygotsky's (1981) notions of language as mind tool, activity theorists define language as a tool through which members act in order to complete tasks and identify with the communities they inhabit (Havnes, 2004; David & Victor, 2002). As such,

language becomes a technology that is acquired, appropriated, manipulated, and recreated to serve specific purposes. For example, David & Victor (2002) used activity theory to look at how identities are formed through the use of language in communities of practice, namely universities and schools:

We learn ‘how’ through practice; and through practice, we learn *to be*. In other words, practice shapes our dispositions and belief systems—our identity in a particular profession. When we learn more about a particular domain or profession, we identify more with that profession—forming in a sense an identity of that profession.... Through enculturation (participants performing their specific roles through the assistance of tools and according to the rules of the community), participants learn *to be*, forming an identity particular to that community. (authors’ emphasis, p. 247)

Gee (2005) noted how “language and institutions ‘bootstrap’ each other into existence in a reciprocal process through time” (p. 10). The tutors identified this relationship during our interviews. The manner in which tutors function within the institution, the classroom, and the writing center, as well as the extent to which their contribution is considered successful or effective, depends largely on the structure(s) within which tutors work: their designated role, the rules they must follow, and the tools made available to them. Language is one of those tools, so it is helpful to think of tutors as *carriers* of the institutionalized languages (Gee, 2005) that they have internalized over the years. For the tutor, this means that in order “to be a particular *who* and to pull off a particular *what* requires that [they] act, value, interact, and use language *in sync with* or *in coordination with* other people...in appropriate locations at

appropriate times” (emphasis added, p. 23). As Silvana acknowledged during an interview, “...one thing we’ve discussed in our writing center is that we as writers are adding to conversations that have already happened. We may add something new, but a lot of the information that we’re searching, that we’re utilizing is already out there. The discourse is not new.”

Bruffee’s infusion of socio-linguistic theory into peer tutoring pedagogy led writing center scholars to play closer attention to the importance of “talk” between tutor and writer. Still, even he acknowledged that peers must be taught how to confer and collaborate. They must be given the tools in order to take on their role as tutors and to be successful in those roles. He held that collaboration gave students the opportunity to develop the language necessary for entry into the discourse communities they hoped to access. Bruffee writes (2008), “Negotiating differences among these diverse communities is unavoidable, not only negotiation between individuals in conversation with one another, but also negotiation at the boundaries between the community languages that we have internalized to think with” (p. 10). In her study of tutor talk, Rodby (2002) observed that both tutor and writer “revised their subject positions ongoingly as the discourse mediated their subjectivities” (p. 228). For tutors, this repositioning was not simply a factor of the writing assignment but the necessity to tap into other subjectivities that they occupy in order to keep the session moving forward. Among these subjectivities, Rodby observed, is the tutor’s social role as student.

Writing about peer tutoring conferences in the classroom, Black (1998) agreed with many of Bruffee’s stated benefits of tutoring but advocated a far more explicit,

critical approach to teaching students about other factors that surround access to discourse communities. She writes, “Critical theory, translated into practice, teaches students and their teachers about the power and social structure of the communities they are in or wish to enter and helps them make informed decisions about entrance, resistance, accommodation or affiliation” (p. 31). Borrowing from Bakhtin (1986) Black referred to writing conferences as speech genres, wherein each utterance is “a link in a fabric of chain mail, connected historically and culturally—closely at times, more distantly at others—and always part of both an immediate situation and a larger context” (p. 29). Black’s metaphor differs slightly from Bakhtin’s original. He referred to each utterance as a “link in a chain of speech communion” (cited in Black, p. 31). Whereas Bakhtin’s reference provides an idealistic view of a discursive “communion” between two people, one that presumably ends on mutual good terms, Black’s reminds us of the threat that conferences represent for many students. To emerge from the conference unscathed, each partner arrives protected by their own truths and experiences. Each new utterance, then, is at once both practical and protective, and a product of learned behavior.

Like their peers, writing center tutors have woven into their chain mail remnants of the instruction and ideologies of their teachers and schools they attended. And like their peers, they have also internalized other ideologies—truths—about the value that literacy plays in students’ lives and academic success. Tutors who participated in my study attributed these truths to wider society, laws, academic and professional communities, universities, individual instructors, and peer groups. The demands to which they refer and their conversations about them indicate that these

internalized discourses and ideologies sometimes clash, posing even greater challenges to student writers, and to some students in particular.

To return to the application of vernacular architecture to composition instruction, this study presumes that by examining the “structures” within which writing center tutors feel they must work as tutors and students, the composition field might better understand the effects of standardization on students’ experiences with writing and writing instruction. Thus, this study provides a theoretical foundation and rationale for examining how tutors talk about the expectations they see imposed upon students, as well as the strategies they use to help them, offers clues to the relationship between expectations (i.e. demands, hierarchies, structure, materials, tools, rewards) and the choices students feel they are able to make about their work in light of those expectations. What structures or designs are writers having to work with? How do they adapt those designs with the materials they are given? What tools do they use? What enters into writers’ decisions to make room for their own personal needs for writing? Answers to these questions will not only expand the composition and writing center fields’ current understanding of how standardization affects students’ work, agency, and identities but also present writing center tutors as a credible knowledge community on which the composition community might come to rely for insight into the concerns raised about standardized writing instruction and assessment.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The primary focus of this empirical study are the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on students' writing, agency, and identities. Scholars in both the writing center and composition fields point to the general effects of standardization. Writing center scholars call for writing center tutors to disrupt the status quo caused by that standardization, and composition scholars call for educational reform, especially reform of prescribed, national literacy standards and practices. But no substantive empirical study, from either the writing center or composition field, presents students' perspectives on this topic. This study adds students' voices to both fields' discussions. Findings rely solely on writing center tutors' narrative reflections on their work with students, as well as their own experience as students. The data not only identify the ways in which tutors define those demands, their origins, and their effects but also reveal the strategies tutors use to help students negotiate those demands with their own personal goals for writing.

Two main research questions guide this study:

1. To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities, including:
 1. how tutors define institutional demands for writing;
 2. the agency tutors feel they have in helping writers improve;
 3. the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities; and

4. the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.
2. In what critical ways might tutors' reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

Because this study is an empirical exploration of what tutors' narratives reveal, it is important to note that this study will not attempt:

- to lead tutors to respond to any one particular set of standards or policies that govern writing instruction and assessment;
- to compile an exhaustive list of standards imposed upon students today;
- to determine the degree to which the standards that tutors describe are, in fact, what they come up against during writing center sessions or their own work as student writers;
- to employ either direct observation or discourse analysis of writing center sessions as methods of data collection or analysis; or
- to attribute the demands tutors mention to their own institutions or to generalize demands across those institutions.

In this chapter, I provide rationale and details for how I conducted this study, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis. I begin with a summary of data collection in which I identify the research period, participants, and brief descriptions of the data I collected. I then move to a more thorough discussion of the

types of data I collected and how each related to my research questions. I end this chapter with how each piece was analyzed and triangulated.

Summary of Data Collection

Between October 2007 and May 2009, 56 writing center tutors (28 undergraduate, 27 graduate, 1 Ph.D.) participated in this study. Among the institutions tutors attended were 2 colleges, 13 universities, and 1 community college. My goal was to interview 50 tutors who represented each of the 10 U.S. regions of the International Writing Centers Association. Tutors were interviewed in groups of three to five in face-to-face or internet interviews (using Dell Video Chat, Gizmo, and Skype). I recruited tutors in two ways. I either approached tutors at conferences and asked them to participate, or I contacted directors who then recruited volunteers for me.

Fifty-three of the tutors participated in the interviews. The first 18 tutors were interviewed on the premises of two conferences to which I traveled in 2007 (the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and the Midwest Writing Centers Association's regional conference); those participants represented the Northeast Writing Centers Association (NEWCA), Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA), East Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA), and the Midwest Writing Centers Association (MWCA). During the summer of 2008, I drove through several Midwestern states and interviewed 18 tutors in their writing centers or elsewhere on campus; among those tutors were those who represented the South Central Writing Centers Association (SCWCA) and the MWCA. In 2009, I completed interviews of 17 tutors via the internet or phone in the regions represented

by the South East Writing Centers Association (SWCA), the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association (RMWCA), the Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association (PNWCA), and both the Southern California (SoCal) and Northern California (NoCal) Writing Centers Associations. I recorded and transcribed all of the 17 interviews.

In addition to interviewing the tutors, I also asked them to complete a self-assessment inventory (see Appendix). The first part of the assessment probed tutors' priorities when working with writers by asking them to rank order five objectives for what they generally hoped to achieve during sessions; tutors were also given the opportunity to write in additional expectations. The second portion asked tutors to choose from a list of adjectives those that best described them as tutors. They could add or cross out adjectives that applied or did not apply to them. They could also add adjectives that were not on the list. At the suggestion of one tutor in the first interview group, tutors could also qualify any adjective. (For example, a tutor who felt they were both *directive* or *non-directive* during a session briefly described the circumstances calling for each. A tutor who did not choose *democratic* felt the word needed more explanation.) Among the adjectives from which tutors could choose were words commonly used in the writing center field to describe tutors' work, including those I selected from the leading tutor training manuals (Harris, 1986; McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001; Gillespie & Lerner, 2004; Gillespie & Lerner, 2008; Rafoth, 2005; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2006).

The third piece of data was a final, written narrative, which I solicited via email in answer to a prompt that asked tutors to describe their former writing

instruction and the degree to which it affected their work as a tutor. Two follow-up emails were sent throughout the data collection period to each tutor who had not returned their response.

Participation among the tutors ranked high. Of the 56 tutors, 53 participated in the interviews. Fifty-one tutors (91%) returned the self-assessment inventory. Thirty tutors (54%) responded to the e-mailed narrative prompt.

Description of Participants

All participants in this study were at least 18 years old and served as writing center tutors in post-secondary institutions. No professional tutors were included in the participant pool. All of the tutors volunteered to participate and gave their informed consent prior to their participation. While tutors' directors might have compensated them for their time, I did not. All but one of the 56 tutors were students at the colleges and universities where they tutored; one had recently earned a Ph.D. and served as assistant director of the center where they also tutored. None of their subordinates was present during the interview. Twenty-eight undergraduate and twenty-seven graduate tutors participated in this study. Two of the tutors were writing fellows, assigned to help professors in designated departments design writing assignments and respond to students' papers. Tutors' length of experience ranged from 1 semester to 21 years. Only two tutors had tutored for fewer than two semesters. Among the tutors were five who also self-identified during the interviews as "teachers" at their institutions (graduate assistants, teaching assistants/associates, temporary/adjunct faculty). I did not ask tutors to identify their age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, or grade level.

To protect tutors' identities, I assigned each a pseudonym. All but three of the first names were pulled at random from a name generating search engine on the internet. All but five of the last names were also randomly chosen. I assigned pseudonyms to each institution that identify it by regional location. I prepared the interview transcriptions myself, noting the date, location, start and end time of each interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In a separate Excel file, I kept a record of each tutor's participation, including their name and pseudonym, date of interview, email addresses, university and pseudonym, and length of experience (in months). I also used that file to track each individual's return of the self-assessment and e-mailed prompt and indicated both date and type of any follow-up attempted to retrieve those pieces.

The Interviews

Overview of Interview Method

Cultural interviews are an appropriate form of data collection when participants have expertise that allows them to comment on terms that affect lived experience. This includes how those terms are defined, how they shape experience, and how they are transferred among members of a cultural community (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This study explores the terms that reflect and affect the cultural norms of writing instruction and assessment (institutionalized demands) by offering the views of writing center tutors who, as members of that culture, have internalized those terms throughout their educational lives (Bruffee, 1984). Writing center peer tutors' dual status as students and tutors qualifies them as participants for a study of this nature. As students, tutors come to their work in the writing center already well

steeped in the institution's expectations and discourse related to composition instruction. They mix that Discourse with others derived from membership in the many discourse communities to which they belong both on and off campus (Gee, 2005). Those discourses become subordinate to the Institution's, creating for both tutor and student a challenge to, as Cooper (1994/2008) posits, negotiate the writer's personal goals for writing with others' expectations. Tutors' experiences as tutors and students qualify them to describe the culture surrounding this process from more than one perspective.

In this study, tutors offer their perceptions of the culture of writing instruction and tutoring writing by reconstructing lived experiences to better understand them, to "shed new light on old problems," to examine tutors' and students' roles within the institution, and to help explain barriers to their and students' success (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). My interview method was designed to evaluate both cultural and topical ideals, a common occurrence in qualitative interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I probed the culture surrounding the effects of institutionalized demands on writers' work, agency, and identity by asking the tutors to address specific topics within that culture. As should be the case with cultural interviews, I began the interviews with a general question designed to launch the conversation, but once that discussion began, I asked follow-up questions that further probed tutors' experiences.

Interview Questions

Following a semi-structured protocol, I asked only three common questions of each group of tutors. Those questions encouraged thick description (Geertz, 1973, p.

9) of each tutor's local circumstances. The questions stem from a quotation pulled from a popular, anthologized article in the writing center field:

In her 1994/2003 article "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers," Marilyn Cooper wrote that tutors must help writers "negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs" (p. 140).

- 1) What do you think Cooper means by "institutional demands"?
- 2) What, if any, demands do you think are imposed on the writers you help in the writing center?
- 3) How do you accomplish the negotiation?

I limited the number of common questions to allow tutors to explore the issues with each other and to help me reach an understanding of the issues raised by my study's research questions (Maxwell, 2005):

- 1) To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities, including:
 1. how tutors define institutional demands for writing;
 2. the agency tutors feel they have in helping writers improve;
 3. the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities; and
 4. the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.

- 2) In what critical ways might tutors' reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

The interview questions related directly to the study's research questions. First, this study offers an exploration of tutors' notions of institutional demands (Research Question 1), and my using Cooper's quotation to begin the interview freed tutors to explore what those words meant before describing how they manifested in their work (Interview Questions 1 and 2). The second part of Cooper's quotation introduces the binary relationship so often suggested between institutional demands and writers' personal goals for writing, a relationship that affects writers' work, agency, and identities (Research Question 1). It also acknowledges that, though demands and personal goals for writing need not be mutually exclusive, negotiating them is difficult to do. As students, tutors know this well (Research Question 1.1-4). Thus, this quotation invited tutors to reflect on that difficulty by describing specific strategies they use to help writers with that negotiation (Interview Question 3).

Follow-up Questions

As a "responsive interviewer," (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15), I also made space for tutors to move away from the central questions I asked and allowed them to linger where and as long as they cared to. The transcripts reflect their digressions and questions for each other. Often, tutors steered the conversation back toward the central questions by connecting their experiences or observations to those questions. In the event they did not, I asked them to make those connections or asked follow-up questions to encourage them to do so.

Two additional conditions led me to ask follow-up questions during the interview. One risk of interviewing participants in groups is that one member can dominate the discussion, leaving other participants to cut short an answer or not answer at all. Another risk is that a participant may not feel entirely comfortable answering a question as thoroughly or candidly. They may not want to appear to disagree with other participants. Or, they may feel their answer will not be what the interviewer wants to hear. Other circumstances may also influence a participant's willingness to answer that may not be obvious to the researcher or other participants. Thus, in order to engage each tutor as completely as possible, without forcing them to, I took notes, read back answers before moving on to the next question, and asked if anyone had anything to add or clarify. I also listened for what was and was not said. When necessary, I asked tutors who had yet to contribute if they would like to comment and asked if anyone would like to clarify or amend what they said. At the end of each interview, I also asked tutors if they had any questions for me.

Interviews averaged between one hour and one hour and fifteen minutes. All were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcripts indicate verbatim answers, emphasized words, gestures, and expressions (laughter, anger, surprise).

Self-Assessment Inventories

Included among the three pieces of data is a self-assessment inventory (see Appendix) that gave tutors the opportunity to self-assess their own priorities and traits. So often, tutors are trained to believe that an ideal tutor exists (Boquet, 2000). I wanted to give tutors a chance to paint their own portraits.

The inventory consists of two parts that relate to both research questions. Part One asked tutors to rank order their priorities among five objectives when working with a writer. Those objectives include standards for “good writing,” the writer’s personal needs for writing, and institutional expectations for writing apparent in an assignment or professor’s expectations. The objectives also include reference to the tutor’s training and expectations for how tutors are to work with students. The overlap between these objectives reflects the complicated nature of negotiation among expectations to which Cooper points and the subsequent effects on the tutor’s work, agency, and identity (Research Question 1). Tutors ranked the five objectives from 1 (I am most interested in) to 5 (I am least interested in):

- Fulfilling the writer’s needs and goals for their own writing.
- Fulfilling the assignment’s/professor’s expectations for writing.
- Fulfilling training and/or the director’s expectations for working with writers.
- Fulfilling my own expectations of how best to achieve the writers’ needs and goals.
- Fulfilling other expectations of what good writing is.

For the last objective, tutors were invited to list those other expectations. They could also add objectives of their own.

Part Two “How would you characterize yourself as a tutor?” asked tutors to choose from among 20 adjectives often used in the writing center field to describe tutors. Like the objectives in Part One, the adjectives in Part Two offered tutors the opportunity to reflect on their work. Rather than ask them to generalize their work (as

Part One did) or speak to one or two specific sessions (as the interview questions did), Part Two recognized that there is no one way to tutor, and the adjectives allowed tutors to reflect on their experiences and how different sessions require them to act in different ways. The self-assessment inventory complements the other data by expanding tutors' answers to the interview question about strategies used during the sessions.

E-mailed Narratives

The final piece of data I distributed to tutors was an e-mailed prompt that asked tutors to answer the following question:

Think about how you were taught to write and are now expected to write for an academic audience. What do you think was effective and ineffective? How is your experience reflected (or not reflected) in the work you do as a writing tutor?

This piece offered tutors a chance to examine their own histories with writing instruction and the extent to which they felt that instruction influenced their tutoring practices. In her book *Composing a Teaching Life*, Ruth Vinz (1996) wrote about the benefits to teachers who engage in this sort of examination. I've revised her original text slightly to show that tutors can benefit, as well:

[Tutors'] reflections can provide certain types of understanding about how identities, subjectivities, and political structures shape schools. [Tutoring] is full of questions.... As we struggle to define and redefine our place..., we discover that there is no perfect or generalized model to explain how one

learns to teach. The process of composing a [tutoring] life is one of revising and reshaping. (p. xi)

I told tutors that they could answer the prompt in as many or as few words, as formally or informally as they desired. Of the 56 tutors who participated in the study, 30 returned this piece.

Analysis

“Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” (Geertz, 1973, p.29)

I triangulated three pieces of data for this study to protect the results from being disproportionately influenced by any one method or participant and, at the same time, to broaden the foundation for understanding my study’s topic (Maxwell, 2005). Among the pieces triangulated were transcripts of the tutors’ conversations, self-assessments, and responses to an e-mailed prompt. In the next sections, I describe each piece. In Chapter Four, I present the results of that triangulation. In Chapter Five, I discuss the findings from this process in more detail.

Analysis of the Narratives

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), coding interview data allows for the discovery of how “concepts, themes, and events...[portray] a culture” (p. 207). Fifty-three tutors participated in the interviews over the three years of data collection (2007, 2008, 2009). In total, 17 interviews were conducted; this number represents the number of small groups interviewed. By chance, each group was comprised of nearly the same number of tutors: 18, 18, and 17. To manage the coding of nearly 26 hours of interviews and to render as much information from the transcripts as possible, I coded each group’s conversation separately and then grouped those

findings and coded them again. This allowed me to identify concepts, themes, and events for each group of research partners, which I then compared to other groups'. I also pulled these small group transcripts together and looked at them as a whole, identifying additional data units that emerged. I repeated this process three times (for each calendar year).

Coding for concepts. Grouping the interviews in this way allowed me to take tutors' words and assign them to categories that emerged from their discussions. I first coded the data units according to the concepts related to my interview questions. Rubin and Rubin (2005) define concepts as "a word or term that represents an idea important to the research problem" (p. 207). The concepts I first coded for included *institutional demands* for writing, *personal goals* for writing, *local demands* imposed on students, *negotiation* (between institutional demands for writing and personal goals for writing), *strategies* (used to help students with negotiation), *effects* on student *agency*, and effects on student *identity*. The data units (or tutors' responses) ranged from one-word descriptions to sentences. I first coded for *institutional demands* as a concept and drew up a list of words that tutors defined as "institutionalized demands." I noticed that tutors often attributed those demands to "groups" within society or the academy. Those groups became the bases for categories of demands. As tutors spoke, they often added examples of the demands; in round one of the coding, I used those examples to develop additional categories. In round two, those examples were added as additional demands if they were not mentioned previously or grouped under new categories. Interview question two asked tutors to list specific demands they saw imposed on the writers who sought their help.

If tutors mentioned local demands that were not included on the earlier list of institutional demands, I added them.

When I coded for the strategies tutors used, I simply identified excerpts from the transcripts wherein tutors described strategies they used to address a student's request for help.

My goal was to mine each list of concepts for additional concepts and events that, when combined, would eventually help me to identify themes. Each time, new data units were identified that created new concept lists. For example, I did not ask, nor did I anticipate tutors' extending the list of demands into a discussion of their origins, but they did. I also did not anticipate that they would refer to consequences for not meeting those demands. I treated these unanticipated concepts as separate data units, which I assigned to their own lists and to those that already existed. Among those new lists/categories are origins of demands; manifestations of demands; epistemologies and ideologies related to the demands; students' reactions to demands; consequences for meeting/not meeting the demands; and frustrations (tutors' and students').

Though Chapter Four and Chapter Five offer more detail about what the coding revealed, data from the groups pointed to my participants' collective awareness of factors that root both institutional and local demands to societal expectations, academic traditions, ego, hierarchy, ideology, and cultural and linguistic biases. They include specific references to the effects on tutors' practices, students' composing processes, and both tutors' and writers' agency in their own learning. They also show how the process of meeting or not meeting those demands affects

tutors' and students' identities. In short, the tutors' answers not only addressed the research questions but also went beyond them.

Identification of emergent themes. Rubin and Rubin (2005) define themes as “summary statements and explanations of what is going on” (p. 207) that can emerge from the many layers of “codes,” as well as a “notable quote” that “[seems] to provide a direct answer to the research questions” (p. 205). I heard these quotations at the time of the interview and would jot them down with other notes at the moment they were uttered. If, when transcribing the tapes, the quote caught my attention again, I regarded it as a potential theme and looked for other quotations that supported or countered it. I also identified from within the transcripts quotations that suggested tutors' application of either the composition or writing center fields' literature (i.e. references to Bartholomae, Lunsford, North, and others).

From the many layers of conceptual information emerged prevalent themes. I found it useful to compare and contrast these themes to the tutors' “quotable quotes” to get closer to how their prior praxis connects with the knowledge they constructed together during the interviews. I also looked at connections between those themes and, when I found them, I merged them into fewer over-arching themes. While Chapter Five offers a more thorough discussion of those themes, the following is a partial list, drawn from the first group of interviews that, when considered in total, reflects the degree to which tutors' answers related to the questions that guide this study:

- The genesis and influences of both linguistic, rhetorical, and academic conventions on writing instruction and assessment.

- The sometimes competing notions of student success held by society, the student's institution, the student's field of study (discipline, department, faculty, field), and the student.
- The consequences of not meeting or meeting expectations.
- The purpose of education and its effect on student identity.
- The writing centers' role in writing instruction.

Analysis of the Self-Assessment Inventories

Part One of the self-assessment inventory asked tutors to rank five priorities for what they hoped to accomplish during a writing center session. To analyze Part One, I found the number of tutors who ranked each option as their first, second, third, fourth, and fifth priority. Based on the majority of the responses, I arrived at a generalizable rank ordering of the priorities. I also identified exceptional cases. These findings were compared to the themes drawn from the interviews. Part Two initially directed tutors to circle, cross out, or add any adjectives they felt described or did not describe them as tutors. During the first interview, a tutor asked if they could also write in qualifiers for the adjectives, which I encouraged them (and the additional groups) to do. To analyze Part Two, I counted up the number of tutors who circled or crossed out each adjective then rank ordered each adjective according to those numbers. I also listed the qualifiers for each adjective (circled or crossed out). I chose to statistically analyze the self-assessment inventory for two reasons. Doing so allowed me to identify commonalities among answers across all of the tutors and to identify whether those commonalities fit within popular notions of “ideal” tutors and tutoring practices. For instance, in recent years, the IWCA adopted a Diversity

Statement, which encouraged members to address issues of diversity in their writing centers and on their campuses. Those issues include but are not limited to tutoring practices. On the self-assessment, I included several qualities related to diversity issues, including those adjectives that could arguably work toward or against the ideal of respecting diversity (i.e. democratic, anti-racist, conventional, standards-oriented). I was also able to compare tutors' answers to what they said in the interviews about their roles and their pedagogies.

Analysis of the E-mailed Narratives

Tutors were asked to reflect on their prior experiences learning to write and then to comment on the degree to which prior instruction influenced their tutoring practices. I did not code tutors' responses, which varied in length from one paragraph to ten pages. I simply read them for what they revealed about how tutors named their prior instruction, which allowed me to identify the tutors' histories with various institutional demands for writing. I noted whether tutors felt their prior experience influenced their tutoring practices, and if tutors offered information about the strategies they used, I added those strategies to the lists compiled from the interviews. Finally, I looked for ways in which tutors described how their writing practices and identities were affected by their prior instruction and whether now, as a writing center tutor and college writer, they noted any changes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This study holds that students perceive the effects of institutional demands for writing on their work, agency, and identities in ways that scholars and faculty cannot. Providing those perspectives are writing center tutors whose dual status as student and tutor offers two lenses through which to view those effects. Thus, this study adds students' voices to those of scholars, educationists, and compositionists who decry the effects of standardization on the teaching and learning of writing. This chapter reports the results of my study of the effects of institutionalized demands for writing and assessment on tutors' and students' work, agency, and identities. In the following pages, I summarize the results of my analyses of select data for each of the main research questions. In Chapter 5, I offer discussion of these results and the implications of this study for the composition and writing center fields.

Data Sources

To explore the effects of institutional demands for writing on writing center tutors' work, I triangulated three sources of data: an interview, a self-assessment, and a written narrative response. In the following paragraphs, I describe each of these data sources in detail. I then turn to a summary of what analysis of these data sources revealed. In Chapter Five, I offer a full discussion of the study's findings, which I illustrate with commentary from the writing center tutors who participated in this study.

A total of 56 writing center tutors participated in this study. Data emerged from three triangulated sources: 17 small group interviews with 53 tutors; 51 self-

assessment inventories; and 30 written narratives. Between 2007 and 2009, 6 of the 17 small group interviews were conducted on site at conferences; 3 of the interviews were conducted on site at universities but not in the writing centers themselves; 5 of the interviews were conducted via internet video chat; and 1 of the interviews took place over the phone. The interviews offered tutors the opportunity to offer their own definitions and examples of institutional demands for writing, observations of how those demands affect teaching and learning, and strategies for helping writers negotiate those demands with personal goals for writing. After each interview, I asked tutors to complete a self-assessment inventory designed to gather additional information about their work as tutors. The inventory consisted of two parts. Part One asked tutors to rank order their priorities when working with writers. Part Two asked tutors to select or reject adjectives that described or did not describe them as tutors; to add new adjectives they felt described them as tutors; and to qualify any adjective they wished. All but three of the adjectives on the original list were taken from writing center scholarship. Of the 56 tutors who participated in the study, 51 returned the self-assessment inventory. The final data source was an e-mailed prompt that asked tutors to describe the degree to which their own experiences learning to write influenced their tutoring praxis; the prompt also gave tutors a third opportunity to reflect on institutional demands for writing and their effects on them as students, writers, and tutors. Of the 56 tutors to whom the prompt was e-mailed, 30 responded with written narratives that ranged from 1 paragraph to 10 double-spaced pages.

This chapter provides an overview of the results of the data collected and begins to relate the results to the study's research questions. I describe the themes that

emerged from the transcribed and coded interviews, present the results from the self-assessment inventories, and then summarize the findings from the e-mailed narratives. Chapter Five further details my interpretation of the results across the three data sources. In that chapter, I also relate the results to the study's research questions and discuss the implications of the findings.

Participants

Fifty-six writing center tutors participated in this study. At the time of the interviews, 28 tutors were undergraduate students, and 27 were graduate students. One participant held a Ph.D. and worked as assistant director of their university's writing center, but none of their subordinates was present during the interview. In total, the participants represented 16 institutions (2 colleges, 13 universities, and 1 community college) and all 10 U.S. regions of the International Writing Centers Association.

Tutors were asked to identify their length of service to the writing center field, which ranged from 3 months to 21 years. They were not asked to identify themselves by age, race, sex, gender, or class, nor were they asked to identify their linguistic, cultural, or religious backgrounds. However, as I discuss later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five, tutors did refer to how these identity markers affected their own reactions to institutional demands for writing, namely professors' assignments and comments on students' papers, and the strategies they offered to help writers meet, adapt, or resist those demands. That tutors' comments of this nature appeared in either the interviews, the narratives, or both pointed to consistencies among the tutors' reflections on this topic.

Interviews

Between October 2007 and May of 2009, I conducted 17 small group interviews and transcribed approximately 26 hours of recorded conversation. Transcripts for each interview ranged from 3 to 20 single-spaced pages and yielded 246 single-spaced pages of data. Though I did not employ discourse analysis in this study, I noted verbatim comments, pauses, and gestures.

I asked three interview questions of each group of tutors. The questions stemmed from a quotation from Marilyn Cooper's (1994/2008) article "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers," in which Cooper wrote that tutors must help writers "negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs" (p. 140). The three questions I asked each group were:

1. What do you think Cooper means by "institutional demands"?
2. What, if any, demands do you think are imposed on the writers you help in the writing center?
3. How do you accomplish the negotiation?

As illustrated in Chapter Three, these questions relate directly to the research questions for this study:

1. To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities, including:
 1. how tutors define institutional demands for writing;
 2. the agency tutors feel they have in helping writers improve;
 3. the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities; and

4. the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.
2. In what critical ways might tutors' reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

Chapter Three offers a detailed explanation of how I coded tutors' comments by assigning them to concepts drawn from the interview and research questions. The concepts included:

1. *institutional demands* for writing;
2. students' personal *goals* for writing;
3. *local demands* for writing that tutors identify as those imposed on students;
4. *negotiation* between institutional demands for writing and personal goals for writing;
5. *strategies* tutors use to help students negotiate between institutional demands for writing and personal goals for writing;
6. *effects* on tutor *agency* during the writing center session; and
7. effects on tutor *identity*.

Given the close relationship between the interview questions and the concepts drawn from the research questions, many of the tutors' comments were assigned to more than one concept: institutional demands and local demands; negotiation and strategies; and agency and identity. Consequently, some concepts yielded more coded

comments than others. For example, tutors' comments yielded 33 single-spaced pages of information for institutional and local demands for writing but only two comments that directly pointed to a writer's personal goals, a finding I discuss further in this chapter and again in Chapter Five. An equal number of single-spaced pages of coded information emerged for the other pairs of concepts (negotiation and strategies and agency identity).

After initially coding the transcripts, I identified categories that emerged for each concept and themes that emerged from those categories. I describe those themes and their relationships in the first section of this chapter. In Chapter Five, I present tutors' comments for those themes and connect the themes to findings from other data sources. A full discussion of how the data answer the study's research questions also appears in Chapter Five.

Summary of Interview Results

From my analysis of the data sources, it is clear that writing center tutors' observations went beyond the scope of this study's research questions to show that tutors and students have the expertise to speak on the topic of institutional demands for writing, their myriad forms, their sources, and their effects. All are evident in tutors' descriptions of their own and other students' experiences with institutional demands for writing. Tutors observed a cause and effect relationship between those demands and students' reactions to those demands, their composing processes, their lack of agency in their own learning as writers, and their identities as members of academic, disciplinary, and professional discourse communities to which students aspire to join. In addition, tutors' comments reveal the ways in which they attempt to

use multiple strategies to help writers to negotiate between those standard demands and personal goals for writing. Tutors' descriptions of writing center sessions in the interviews and narrative responses point to the circumstances under which they help writers accept, adapt, or resist the standard demands for writing imposed upon them. From tutors' comments, conclusions can also be drawn about the circumstances under which tutors and students appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment. In the following sections, I provide results of analysis of all data sources. In Chapter Five, my discussion provides more detail for each set of findings and includes tutor comments.

Themes and categories related to the concept of institutional demands.

Analysis of tutors' answers to the first two interview questions yielded eight distinct themes related to the concept of institutional demands:

1. Students are expected to learn/use the "language of academic discourse."
2. Students are aware of the consequences for meeting/not meeting those demands.
3. Writing centers are implicated in the demands.
4. Specific populations experience demands differently.
5. Students' reactions depend on the relationships they have within a hierarchy.
6. Institutional demands for writing do not have to be dichotomous or either/or.
7. Students believe their role is to _____.
8. Tutors believe their role is to _____.

In the following paragraphs, I briefly describe each theme.

Theme 1. Students are expected to learn/use the “language of academic discourse.” Analysis of the transcripts reveals a long list of institutional demands for writing that the tutors attributed to general expectations held by society, the academy, and their institutions about writing for academic purposes. As tutors indicated, those expectations also held consequences for those who teach and those who learn. Tutors’ comments point to the relationship between institutional demands for writing and professors’ assignments and assessment procedures, which then affected students’ composing processes. Larissa Carlson, a tutor in the first interview group noted how that relationship linked to a prevailing expectation held within society and academia that students learn and use the “language of academic discourse.” According to the tutors, institutionalized demands for writing carried the expectation for conformity to:

- traditional/conventional rules for error-free writing;
- Standard English in speaking and in writing;
- standard formats and rules about grammar and style; and
- standard curricula and assignments.

Tutors also commented on prevailing opinions that standardization and conformity to standards led to skill transfer, student success, and retention. Specifically, tutors noted how standardization contributed either positively or negatively to:

- students’ agency in their own learning;
 - students’ failure as writers;
 - students’ attitudes about writing and perceptions of themselves as writers;
- and

- students' membership in academic and professional discourse communities.

When defining institutional demands (either general or specific), tutors often spoke about the sources of those demands. For instance, in addition to those standards for conformity previously discussed were standards tied closely to a university's ideals or traditions. Tutors reported that these standards closely follow society's expectations, as well as the university's and professoriate's political and religious leanings. Among the ideals that tutors mentioned were:

- specific, required standards each student was expected to meet;
- knowledge hierarchies rooted in university traditions;
- assessment expectations and standard rates of progress; and
- programmatic standards.

Tutors also pointed to how standards are communicated and enforced through guidelines set by professors, departments, and disciplines and communicated through standard materials, assignments, assessments, and responses. As tutors observed, the expectations of the university at-large sometimes clash with those held by individual professors or departments. According to the tutors, this "competition" between the standards of the university and the professoriate resulted in competing goals for writers; competing curricula; and competing ideologies about what is acceptable. As tutors' comments convey, that competition led students to engage in a range of ineffective composing strategies and to feel a range of emotions that ranged from confusion to anger to desperation. Students' reactions also led to tutors' inability to

steer students back toward more effective composing strategies. I discuss these findings in greater detail later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five.

Theme 2. Students are aware of the consequences for meeting/not meeting demands. Another emergent theme linked standards and professor's expectations for academic writing with how students' awareness of the consequences for meeting or not meeting them affected their composing processes. In each group, tutors referred to how students' awareness of meeting or not meeting the expectations placed before them negatively affected their composing processes and complicated tutors' attempts to steer students toward more global concerns in their work, effective composing strategies, or both. The majority of tutors' comments pertained to the negative consequences that students experienced or feared experiencing if they did not meet expectations. Consequently, tutors also described more ineffective approaches to writing by students who attempted to meet demands, as well as a lack of agency in their own learning to write. I explain both of these outcomes in more detail later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five. Furthermore, more tutors attributed those consequences to individual professors' approaches to teaching writing as a *product* and assessing writing, accordingly. Among the consequences tutors described were specific pressures on students, tutors, and writing centers to produce "perfect" writing; grades; high-stakes expectations for graduate thesis or dissertation writers; and expectations for student progress.

According to my analysis of the transcripts, those consequences and pressures affected students' and tutors' agency and identities in ways that the current scholarship does not address and faculty may not know. They also influenced tutors'

decisions about which strategies to employ when helping students negotiate between the demands and their personal goals for writing. Later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five, I discuss the effects on agency, identity, and negotiation in more detail.

Theme 3. Writing centers are implicated in the demands. All groups of tutors pointed to a perception that writing centers perpetuate standardization of writing instruction and assessment. In every group, tutors noted that writing centers are institutions, too, whose role is often misunderstood by students and professors who believe that the writing center tutor's role is to "fix student's problems," or bring students up to standard expectations, especially on specific rhetorical and grammatical expectations. According to tutors, writing centers' involvement in that imposition stemmed from perceptions—and misperceptions—of the role of the writing center and tutor. Analysis of tutors' comments yielded three main categories for this particular theme: conclusions drawn about the writing center's perceived role; the writing center tutor's perceived role; and the nature of writing centers as institutions.

Relevant to these categories are tutors' comments about how writing centers are misunderstood by students and faculty; how writing center tutors' experiences and training affect their work; how writing center tutor training runs contrary to standardization; and how writing center assessment ties writing centers to standardization. The common thread linking each of these categories is the reputation of the director or writing center on campus. Tutors who described their centers as having the reputation for helping students adapt or resist what one tutor described as the institution's voice also described directors who had the same reputation. Those

directors not only trained tutors to do so but supported them when or if professors or students complained.

Tutors in two groups also discussed the commercial aspects of the writing center that implicated the field in the institution's demands. One group of tutors pondered the effects of their center being named after a prominent corporation. Another group pointed to writing center assessment and the forms that tutors and students complete during sessions as signs that the writing center supported the institution's demands for writing. I will discuss these perceptions in more detail in Chapter Five.

Theme 4. Specific populations experience demands differently. While all groups of tutors referred to students' reactions to demands for writing, in all interviews, references were made to student populations most affected by institutionalized demands for writing. Tutors' perceptions of this reality are among the most significant findings of this study for two reasons. The first is that tutors are also students, and as such, some tutors are among the groups they described. The second reason is that tutors' status as student means they can describe the effects on students in ways that faculty cannot or, as some tutors observed, choose not to do.

Categories were developed for each of those populations, including:

- freshmen;
- English Language Learners;
- dissertating students;
- non-traditional aged/returning adult students; and
- students enrolled in research, technical science, or Conservatory classes.

Tutors also astutely pointed to other factors that affected students' reactions to the demands, including:

- age, race, culture, language, gender;
- socioeconomic status;
- high school preparation; and
- family and life experiences.

In general, tutors described students' reactions as ranging from determination to tears, depending on where students saw themselves within a number of hierarchies: within society; within the academy; within school; and within the writing center, where the tutor was seen as a part of the institution.

Theme 5. Students' reactions depend on the relationships they have within hierarchies. Tutors spoke about how students' perceptions of where they stand within several hierarchies affected their reactions to the demands they were asked to meet. My analysis of tutors' comments led to several categories of hierarchies, of which students are aware. Where the student sees themselves within the hierarchies largely determines their response to institutional demands. Thus, the relationships the student has to others within the hierarchies are important factors in the student's response to institutional demands for writing. Those relationships include those that the student has through membership in school and society, with professors, and with the tutor. Also mentioned were the student's perception of the writing center's relationship to other groups within the university.

Theme 6. Institutional demands for writing do not have to be dichotomous or either/or. As one tutor observed, the way in which Cooper describes the role of the

tutor seems to suggest a dichotomous relationship between the presence of institutional demands and a student's personal goals for writing. In two interview groups, tutors addressed this dichotomy directly by stating that there need not be an "either/or" relationship between meeting institutional demands and meeting personal goals for writing. The majority of tutors who reflected on the degree to which their own prior writing instruction affected their tutoring practice also indicated that once students learn to meet the standards, they can then choose to adapt or resist them. Another finding from the interviews is that only one student was described as coming to the writing center for reasons other than an assignment or a professor's expectations, which I describe later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five. Thus, analysis of the interviews and narratives pointed to how tutors know the need for students to meet institutional demands for writing. As Silvana, a tutor from Heartland University who participated in one of the first interview groups acknowledged,

institutional demands are formulas for adding new information. And that's what we're navigating...what we as writers or the students we work with as writers are adding to this conversation versus what's already there, what's prescribed, what's accepted or not accepted.

Nyla, a tutor from Northlake University who participated in that conversation described sessions in which she helped writers avoid becoming "victims" of institutional, standard demands. Nyla described how writing center tutors should support writers as they deliberate the degree to which they will meet, adapt, or resist the demands imposed upon them. She gave the example of dissertating writers who choose to meet demands they may not want to meet; they choose to do so because

they know that the consequences are “career-making or career-breaking.” According to Nyla, students who are aware that they have choices who then choose to comply with demands should not be seen as “victims” or “sell-outs.” They should be seen as decision makers.

Thus, while tutors expressed frustration with the pressures that led to so many students to comply with demands, analysis of tutors’ comments led me to conclude that tutors also believed that:

- institutional demands were formulas for adding new information;
- writing centers were institutions, but they were porous; and
- students could avoid becoming “victim” to demands by choosing to meet them.

This last finding, in particular, relates to findings from the tutors’ narratives, in which many tutors described the empowerment that came with the mastery of standard “rules” for writing. Tutors felt that once those rules were learned, students were free to choose to break them.

Theme 7. Students believe their role is to ____. This theme, drawn from comments tutors made as they described sessions with students, closely ties the concept of institutional demands to students’ agency in their own learning and identities. For that reason, this theme overlaps considerably with two other themes: students’ reactions to demands and their perceptions of their place within social and academic hierarchies. According to the tutors, students’ experience in society and high school socialize them to believe that students are to:

- summarize knowledge that is already out there;

- think like “educated” people;
- “ace” tests and assignments in order to get an A;
- “stuff themselves” into prescriptions for genre, style, and voice.

Concomitant with these references are institutional demands for writers’ expressed personal goals for writing. That is, the system of schooling and approaches to writing instruction and assessment that most students experience do not socialize them to believe that they must have personal goals for their own writing. As I discuss later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five, only one student was described as coming to the center to work on goals that were unrelated to an assignment or professor’s comments. But even that student came to improve their fluency in written and spoken academic English in order to perform well in courses. I also discuss how students sometimes took extreme measures to avoid negative consequences for not meeting the demands of an assignment or a professor.

Theme 8. Tutors feel their role is to _____. Emerging from the analysis of the transcripts was a final theme for the concept of institutional demands, and one that is related to how tutors’ expertise and experience as tutors, as students, and as members of specific student populations shaped their response to the institutional demands they experience in the classroom or in the writing center. For example, tutors in every group acknowledged being trained to advocate for students. Tutors also acknowledged knowing firsthand the expectations students face, the pressures to meet those expectations, as well as the consequences for meeting or not meeting them. The relationship between what tutors are trained to do and what they know students must do complicates their responses to students’ requests for help. Tutors’

shared student identities also affect their responses to institutional demands for writing and students' requests for help. I will discuss how these traits shape and are shaped by tutors' experiences with institutional demands for writing later in this chapter and more fully in Chapter Five.

Themes and categories related to the concepts of local demands and personal goals. While the first interview question sought tutors' general sense of institutional demands, the second interview question asked tutors for the specific demands that they saw imposed on the students who sought their help. Analysis of the transcripts reveal a pattern to tutors' responses. As conversations ensued, the list of institutional demands grew to include general demands with which tutors were aware either as a result of their prior school experiences and their notions of what society or the academy expected. The list also included local demands that tutors helped writers to meet.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed an important finding that relates to tutors' comments about how institutional demands for writing affect students' agency in their own learning and engagement as writers. As previously mentioned, there was no mention of any student asking for help with a personal goal for writing that did not answer an assignment, a professor's expectations, a specific genre's requirements (i.e. graduate school essays, dissertation guidelines, technical report), or the student's desire to improve proficiency in written or spoken Standard English. This finding also reinforces what tutors described as the difficulties they sometimes face when attempting to help students see themselves as writers. I discuss this finding in the next section and again in Chapter Five as it relates to how standard demands affect

students' agency in their own learning, attitudes about writing, and perceptions of themselves as writers. I also discuss this finding and its relationship to tutors' praxis, their agency in the tutoring session, and their identities.

Themes and categories related to the concept of strategies of negotiation.

The third interview question asked tutors to describe the strategies they used to help writers negotiate between personal goals for writing and institutional demands for writing. From the transcripts, I drew out the strategies tutors described using with students, as well as tutors' own thoughts on what negotiation meant. Tutors' comments point to their attempts to define negotiation. Moreover, tutors' answers revealed ways in which tutors found themselves having to negotiate a host of factors related to their own experiences and identities. In other words, tutors found themselves negotiating their own personal goals for the session with what the student wanted. I will discuss this finding in more detail in the next section and in Chapter Five, when I describe tutors' perceptions of negotiation with students and self. I will also describe the apparent relationship between negotiation and students' and tutors' agency and identities that emerged from the analysis.

As mentioned earlier, at no time during the interviews did tutors describe students who came for help with "personal goals" for writing. All requests for help stemmed from the students' desires to meet an institutional demand for writing. Still, in response to requests for help, tutors employed a variety of strategies designed to engage students with their own writing and to help them see themselves as writers. Tutors also referred to their own experience as students and writers. From the interviews, five themes for the concept of negotiation emerged:

1. Tutors use myriad strategies to help students connect with the writing.
2. Tutors respond to students' papers differently than professors do.
3. Tutors use "language and other stuff" to help students learn academic or specialized discourse.
4. Tutors acknowledge the effects of institutionalized demands for writing on the potential for negotiation.
5. Tutors are aware of how their own experiences, ideologies, and identities affect their responses to students' requests for help.

In the following paragraphs, I briefly describe each theme as it relates to the strategies that tutors mentioned using.

Theme 1: Tutors use myriad strategies to help students connect with the writing. Analysis of tutors' comments pointed to a prevailing belief that much of a student's reaction to an assignment or a professor's comments first had more to do with a lack of confidence or a lack of understanding of what was expected than a lack of writing skills. Furthermore, tutors believed that those two factors exacerbated other difficulties students had when writing. Tutors described many sessions with students where they first attempted to build rapport with students through what they characterized as small talk and humor. "I start completely off the page if I can," said Ramesh, a tutor from Middle States University. Tutors believed that conversation about anything but the assignment got the session off to a good start, especially with students who appeared upset, confused, frustrated, or dejected. Tutors also mentioned how they often shared their familiarity with specific professors, assignments, or genre

expectations. When necessary, tutors also offered students beverages, tissues, candy, or time off task.

Tutors also described their use of questions to connect the student to the writing before, during, and after review of the paper. Analysis of tutors' descriptions revealed questions designed to:

- gauge a student's interest in or prior knowledge of the topic;
- limit the focus of the session to one to three priorities for the writer and the paper;
- focus the writer on priority areas;
- point out—from a reader's perspective—the areas where the writer's meaning was unclear;
- indicate where the reader may need the writer to substantiate claims;
- determine the writer's understanding of expectations, including feedback;
- commit the writer to additional work or a follow-up visit after the session; and
- help the writer identify resources for writers.

Oftentimes, tutors justified their strategies by explaining their role as tutors and their priority to steer students toward process and global concerns. In fact, the writing center tutor's role emerged as a theme from analysis of tutors' comments. I discuss this theme later in this chapter.

Theme 2: A tutor's response to students' papers differs from a professor's.

Among the tutors' comments were those that suggested the following differences between their instruction and a professor's responses:

- tutors respond to each student as if meeting students for the first time and as if reading that particular paper, assignment, or genre for the first time;
- tutors read the majority of each student's paper;
- tutors help students understand the difference between higher- and lower-order concerns;
- tutors focus students' attention on one to three concerns during each session that are appropriate for drafting, revising, editing, or proofreading;
- tutors spend a considerable amount of time increasing students' understanding of what is expected of them;
- tutors help students see themselves as writers rather than mere producers of text;
- tutors support each student's desire to make decisions about their own writing and help them find ways to make those decisions while also meeting the demands of an assignment; and
- tutors make it very clear that they are not responsible for students' success or failure.

One common finding across all groups was that tutors know how to talk about writing instruction in ways that help students learn how to write. When tutors described sessions with writers, they provided a context for their responses to a student's papers by describing one or more of the demands the student was expected to meet. Tutors' descriptions point to their skill in using language similar to what composition instructors use to help explain the writing process and expectations for assignments and genre. Tutors also helped students understand the potential meanings

behind professors' comments, many of which tutors characterized as "standard." In Chapter Five, I provide additional details for this theme and discuss its implications with regard to potential reforms to classroom writing instruction and assessment, the second research question for this study.

Theme 3: Tutors use "language and other stuff" to help students gain access to discourse communities. Tutors' descriptions of strategies point to three important findings. The first is their knowledge of the language of the classroom and the institutionalized demands for writing imposed upon students. The second is their acumen for using that language as a tool, along with what Gee (2005) referred to as "other stuff" to help students gain access to the discourse of academic and disciplinary communities. The third is that tutors are critically aware of how that language constrains students' agency in their own learning to write. As I show later in this chapter, those constraints affected students' agency and identities as writers, as well as tutors' agency and identities as tutors.

Theme 4: Tutors acknowledge the effects of institutionalized demands for writing on the potential for negotiation. Analysis of the transcripts also points to tutors' belief that the presence of institutional demands for writing and students' uncritical conformity to those demands limits the potential for negotiating between those demands and students' personal goals for writing. Tutors did not mention working with any students who came to the writing center with any other goal than to meet the demands of the assignment, professor, or genre. While tutors did acknowledge the importance of meeting demands in order to get a good grade or credential, they also noted how students' passivity made them question their efficacy

as tutors. Zada, who also tutors at Middle States University, remarked, “I think it’s just part of the immediate demands of the institution. We are just supposed to be some sort of remedy, and maybe in the long term, that IS how we look at ourselves....” In the next section, I discuss how students’ willing acceptance of institutionalized demands for writing and the institutional expectation that the writing center remedies poor writing affected tutors’ agency in the tutoring process and identities as tutors.

Theme 5: Tutors are aware of how their own experiences, ideologies, and identities affect their responses to students’ requests for help. From analysis of the interview transcripts, it is clear that tutors acknowledged the influence of their own experience and ideologies on their responses to students. Tutors’ descriptions of sessions, the strategies they employed, and their feelings about the efficacy of their own work included these reflective moments. In the next section, I discuss this finding in more detail.

Themes and categories related to the effects of demands on agency and identity. Tutors were never asked to comment on the relationship between institutionalized demands for writing and students’ agency or identities; however, transcripts yielded over 30 pages of tutors’ comments that tied the effects of institutional demands to the agency and identity of both students and tutors. From analysis of the interview transcripts and e-mailed narrative responses, it is clear that institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment affect students’ and tutors’ agency and identities. As the transcripts reveal, the effects on students’ work, agency, and identities could be drawn from tutors’ descriptions of sessions they had

with students who struggled to meet the demands imposed upon them. The effects of institutional demands on tutors' work, agency during the session, and identities also emerged through the interviews and tutors' narrative responses to the e-mailed prompts. In the following paragraphs, I offer a brief illustration of how the effects relate to other findings from the interviews, and the factors that tutors mentioned as having some effect on both students' and tutors' sense of agency during sessions. I then move to brief descriptions of the themes that emerged from analysis of the transcripts. Chapter Five presents a full discussion of these findings and their relationship to the research questions for this study.

The effects of institutional demands for writing instruction and assessment on students are at first evident in the themes related to those discussed earlier for Institutional Demands. Among those themes are students' beliefs about their roles as students, their perceptions of themselves within the hierarchies of school and society, their reactions to institutionalized demands for writing, and their awareness of the consequences for meeting or not meeting those demands. Also related are tutors' perceptions of their roles as tutors and students.

To code for comments related to Agency and Identity, I pulled from the transcripts tutors' comments that described:

- actual sessions with students, including both tutors' and students' responses to the demands of an assignment or professor's comments;
- tutors' responses to papers or assignments that challenged their own ideologies;

- effects of suggested or required visits to the writing center on both students' and tutors' agency in the session;
- reasons for which students sought help in the writing center; and
- feelings expressed by the tutors about their role as tutors and about the perceptions of the writing center's purpose.

As the analysis indicated, the degree of control students and tutors felt over what can occur during a session is largely dependent on a host of factors that often overlap.

Among those factors are those related to the ideals held by the university, the professoriate, and the discourse communities to which students aspire to join. As tutors indicated, students' desires to conform to those ideals combine with students' and tutors' prior experiences as writers. Tutors mentioned the degree to which students have been influenced by their teachers' or professors' product-oriented approaches to writing instruction. Students' misperceptions of the tutor's and writing center's role, and their desire to conform complicates tutors' attempts to steer students toward process and global, higher-order concerns. Tutors also described the degree to which their own ideologies, race, culture, class, and gender identities affected the conversations they had with students.

From the tutors' comments related to these factors, four related themes for Agency and Identity emerged:

1. Perceptions of "ideal" writing affect both student and tutor agency and identity.
2. Agency and identity are tied to students' prior writing experiences, especially product- and process-oriented approaches to writing.

3. Misperceptions of the writing center tutor's role affects tutors' agency and identities as tutors.

4. A tutor's praxis is affected by their ideologies and other identities.

In the following paragraphs, I briefly describe the themes and their relationship to the others. Chapter Five will present a full discussion of how each theme reflects the ways in which institutionalized standards for writing instruction and assessment affect students' agency in their own learning and their identities, as well as tutors' agency in the tutoring process and their identities.

Theme 1. Perceptions of ideal writing affect both the student's and tutor's agency and identity. Analysis of the transcripts revealed the extent to which tutors felt that ideals held by the university, discipline, and professoriate affected students' agency in their own learning, their identities as aspiring members of discourse communities, and the nature of what they sought help for in the writing center. From earlier analysis of the institutional demands that tutors described and students' reactions to those demands, it is clear that both tutors and students are aware that ideals for written and linguistic proficiency, content, form, and style exist. The ideals become institutionalized, and all students are expected to meet them. Tutors are aware of these ideals because they are students. But as tutors also observed, ideals for writing were also apparent in students' requests for help, in professors' comments on students' papers, and on assignments that carried penalties for errors, particularly in grammar and mechanics.

As the transcripts also revealed, these ideals especially affected certain student populations: ESL students, nontraditional students, and students who, as several

tutors reported, seemed to have been inadequately trained for the rigors of college writing. For example, in 13 of the 15 interviews, tutors described ESL students' experiences with standardized demands for writing. Tutors described students who came to the session with a paper on which the professor indicated they should write in Standard English. Other tutors described ESL students who came to the center under their own initiative to expand their understanding of written or spoken Standard English or academic discourse. Tutors who reported having worked with nontraditional students described students who took the initiative to come to the writing center because they either never learned how to write for an academic audience, or they had been away from academic writing for many years. In contrast, tutors found that the majority of younger, traditional-aged students most often came to the center to fulfill a professor's requirement on a paper, even if that requirement was only to show proof of having gone to the writing center. Several tutors reported working with undergraduate students who were under-prepared to write for an academic audience. While tutors described students whose writing and comments during the session clearly indicated lack of preparedness for academic writing, tutors also described students who told them they never took a writing class before. Nora, a tutor who participated in the second interview wave, described a student who said "[they] didn't even learn to read until 8th grade...just got through all of those grade levels with the teachers not even realizing that [they] couldn't read. [They] just remembered things from lectures, and...just spit them back out."

Tutors noted students' "passivity" or "conformity" to demands for an ideal finished product. Jeremy, a tutor from Middle States University, remarked, "there's

almost this sense of passivity on a lot of students. They come in here, and they think we're going to fix [their paper]...and DON'T have a sense of ownership.” Tutors in every interview commented on students’ willingness to conform to standards and how that conformity affected tutors’ agency and identity during the sessions. As the transcripts reveal, tutors described sessions with students who seemed to accept standards without understanding them, without fully questioning them, or without thinking of how they may meet those standards while maintaining a personal connection to their writing. Tutors followed their observations with expressions of understanding, frustration, and failure. As students, tutors understood why students wanted to meet the demands placed upon them. But tutors were frustrated by students’ seeming acceptance of what Ken, a tutor from South Central University, called “the myth of an ideal” piece of writing. Tutors pointed to how the mere existence of institutional demands for writing led to that myth; in fact, the myth of an ideal piece of writing was an institutional demand made evident by professors’ assignments, scoring guides, and comments on students’ papers. Across all transcripts and narrative responses were references to how standards created for students a misconception that “perfect writing” existed, and that ideal should be their goal as writers. The myth also helped perpetuate students’ and professors’ expectations that tutors’ and writing centers’ roles were to help writers achieve that ideal.

Try as they might to increase student’s agency in their own writing, tutors often felt that students’ passive conformity to standards limited what could be done during a session. Several tutors described sessions where they felt like failures. In five interviews, tutors reported how their writing center training and writing center’s

philosophy ran contrary to what most students wanted them to do. Interestingly, two tutors described how they were less frustrated by sessions with upper division or graduate students whose degree or credential seemed to hinge on their conformity to standards for content, style, and form, as well as the use of specialized language and research methodologies. That is, tutors found older, more experienced students whose goal was to earn an advanced degree, career credentials, or both (rather than to merely graduate as undergraduate students hope to do) to be more willing to comply with demands. Chapter Five offers a full discussion of how conformity to ideals and standards manifested in students' requests for help and affected both students' and tutors' agency and identities.

Theme 2. Agency and identity are tied to students' prior writing experiences, especially product- versus process-oriented approaches to writing. Closely related to students' and tutors' awareness of ideals for writing is the influence of their prior writing experiences. Analysis of the interview transcripts reveal the degree to which those experiences have shaped students' approach to writing into one that tutors characterized as predominantly product-oriented. Students' product-oriented approach to writing is evident in tutors' descriptions of the following:

- the nature of the help students requested during sessions;
- the materials the student brought to the session;
- the syllabi and scoring guides with which tutors were familiar; and
- the tutor's failed attempts to help students see themselves as writers and writing as a process.

As the data shows, tutors in every interview described sessions with writers who sought help with what some tutors described as product-oriented questions. All of the tutors fielded requests for help with “grammar” or “editing” or “proofreading.” Tutors who worked with ESL students, in particular, reported students who asked tutors to “check their English” or to determine whether their paper sounded “American enough.” One group of tutors described working with ESL Conservatory students who, because they had never written an academic paper, had no idea where to begin and could not see the relevance of writing to their discipline. Tutors in another group spoke about the emotional turmoil students with refugee status endured as they attempted to answer assignments that asked them to recount horrific, personal experiences. In every interview, tutors described sessions with undergraduate students, particularly first-year composition students, who asked for help with “grammar” or who did not understand that they could write in first-person or write beyond five paragraphs. Similarly, tutors from three institutions noted the effects of professors’ warnings that as few as three grammar errors would result in a grade of C or worse. Whereas mastery of mechanics and grammar seemed to affect lower-division students’ approach to writing the most, tutors at four institutions described upper division students’ interest in mastering the use of specialized language or a particular genre format. In two groups where tutors described working with nontraditional students, initial requests often pointed to the students’ desire to understand professors’ requirements or comments on papers already submitted.

Tutors described sessions with students who had more difficulty writing for a professor who gave students choices or whose expectations were not explicitly stated.

None of the tutors described sessions with students who referred to the writing process in any way. That is, when students were given choices as to what or how to write, they appeared unable to proceed. This finding points to the overall effect of product-oriented, standardized writing instruction and assessment on students' inability to see writing as a process and to choose among effective writing strategies. I discuss this finding later in this chapter when I discuss how prior experience with a product-oriented approach to writing instruction and assessment directly relates to students' willingness to comply with standard demands and how doing so affects students' agency in their own learning and identities. I also discuss this relationship in more detail in Chapter Five.

The transcripts also revealed the effects of materials on students' and tutors' conversations. Those materials included assignment sheets, scoring guides, syllabi, and the student's graded paper or draft. Tutors from three institutions spoke about assignment sheets and scoring guides that explicitly stated how many grammar errors would result in a particular grade, often a grade of C or lower. In one group, a tutor described how the content requirements appeared at the bottom of the page after a long list of requirements for grammar, mechanics, and format. Transcripts from all of the interviews, however, carry comments by tutors who described sessions with students who were either sent to the writing center to "work on their grammar" or whose drafts or graded papers carried a low grade (of D or F) with only one comment (i.e. "Go to the writing center."). At times, professors' comments appeared on only the first several pages. Tutors felt that required visits helped to perpetuate the product-oriented approach that some students took to their writing. One group of

tutors described how their university requires all first-year students to spend an hour per week in the writing center with a tutor.

Combined, the tutors' comments suggest a relationship between what one tutor called the "myth of an ideal" piece of writing, professors' and students' product-oriented approach to writing, and what another tutor described as students' "passive willingness" to conform to institutionalized demands for writing. I refer to this relationship earlier in this chapter. Here, I turn to a discussion of how this relationship frustrated tutors who know that there is no such thing as an ideal piece of writing and who have been trained to help writers see writing as a process. Tutors perceived students growing more dependent on the writing center and the tutor for their success as a writer of ideal writing. Tutors raised questions about whether professors are aware that students are attempting to meet the ideal rather than learn necessary composing skills and writerly habits of mind that will serve them as they proceed throughout their college careers. Tutors who spoke of their frustrations described failed attempts to help students see themselves as writers who could make decisions about their work. They also described students who came back to thank them for a good grade. As the transcripts reveal, tutors who reported students who returned to show their appreciation were discomfited by those sentiments and pointed to them as further proof of students' lack of agency in their own writing and learning to write.

Though tutors tried to help students see themselves as writers and to see writing as a process, most tutors described how their attempts to bring the conversation back to those two priorities were thwarted by the student's desire to give the professor the paper that they wanted. Chapter Five will further describe the

relationship between standardized demands for writing and students' product-oriented approach to writing. I will discuss that relationship and its effects on students' writing, agency in their own learning, and identities. I will also detail the effects of this approach on tutors' work, agency, and identities. Finally, I will connect findings from the interviews with findings from the e-mailed prompts in which tutors describe the degree to which their own writing instruction affects their tutoring praxis.

Theme 3. Misperceptions of the writing center tutor's role affects tutors' agency and identities as tutors. From the transcripts, it is clear that students' passive and willing conformity to standard demands for writing and their product-oriented approach to writing affects tutors' agency and identities as tutors. As tutors' responses to the interview questions show, and as their responses to the inventory and e-mailed prompts reinforce, tutors are trained to take a process-oriented approach to writing and to help students practice that process as they come to know themselves as writers. Tutors also share a "student identity" with the students they tutor. As students, tutors come to their work as tutors having learned how to write in one or more classrooms where product-oriented, standardized instruction was delivered. Tutors reported that they are aware of the consequences for not meeting the demands for a writing assignment even if they never experienced those consequences themselves. Consequently, tutors understand students' motivations to focus on the end product: a paper that reflects the professor's expectations and will result in a good grade or a committee's acceptance. Tutors acknowledged that they enact both their student identity and their tutor identity during each session. They describe their own process approach to writing while invoking their tutor training. They ask questions

that writers might ask themselves but also explain their role as a tutor in order to help students realize that there may be more than one way to meet the expectations of an assignment.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that tutors were apt to judge themselves as ineffective during sessions where attempts to turn a student's attention back to process or global concerns proved unsuccessful. They also felt they had failed to move the student toward an awareness of themselves as writers and as writing as a process. These feelings of failure do not mean, however, that tutors abandoned their training. At times, tutors became even more assertive in their quests to help students see that they could make choices about their own writing.

Tutors reported feelings of frustration when they were unable to move students beyond professors' comments or lower-order concerns. Tutors also mentioned being frustrated to the point of anger with some professors. In three of the interviews, professors' comments became the focus of the conversation among the tutors. In those groups, tutors described sessions with students whose papers indicated that the professor had not read the entire paper but instead wrote a grade of D or F at the top of the page and a comment similar to "Go to the writing center." In one group, tutors spoke extensively about how professors' comments did not provide enough information as to what the student should do to improve their paper, a finding that emerged from other groups' conversations, as well. Similar frustration was expressed by tutors who, like the student, found the professors' assignments or comments confusing. One graduate student tutor reported finding errors among the professor's comments. That is, what the professor marked as errors were not errors, after all. In

interviews where tutors described professors' assignments, scoring guides, or comments as problematic to the student's and tutor's understanding of what was expected, tutors overwhelmingly suggested that the student return to the professor for clarification. Only in one group, where the tutors act as writing fellows assigned to departments and professors, did the tutors report going back to the professors themselves. As I suggest in Chapter Five, tutors' concerns about the impact of professors' assignments, comments (or lack thereof), and focus on lower-order concerns points to an opportunity for the writing center field to work more closely with faculty to inform them of how their priorities are reflected in students' writing and composing processes. That is, if three or more grammar errors will earn a student a D or F, writing centers can help faculty realize that students will then focus on grammar at the expense of other, more important concerns to which tutors referred: thesis, organization, and development. That is, if grades are so closely tied to lower-order concerns, professors will continue to see papers that reflect students' attempts to address only those concerns.

Feelings of failure often followed tutors' frustrations. Failure was most often attributed to sessions with students whom the tutors were unable to move beyond the professors' comments, or the grade they desired on the paper, or the lower order concerns they wanted the tutor to find and to fix for them. Again, for the tutors who pointed to this failure, the source of that feeling were their identities as students and tutors. Tutors empathized with students' desire to get good grades. But they are trained to advocate for students, to help students become aware of and question the demands placed upon them, and to come to view writing as a process and themselves

as writers. That is, tutors felt that their training and identity as a knowledgeable peer failed to result in any gains in helping writers come to view writing as a process and themselves as writers. In two groups, tutors described working with students who, during the session, expressed dissatisfaction with the tutor's help and either left the writing center or asked to work with another tutor. In one group, tutors described working with students who at first sought help with professors' comments or lower order concerns but who eventually seemed eager to move beyond those to higher order concerns; similarly, tutors in those groups described working with students who seemed frustrated by the constraints of an assignment and eventually felt confident they could move beyond them. But among those tutors who reported seeing subsequent drafts of those students' papers were many where the student did not do any of the work they said they would do.

Tutors' descriptions of writing center sessions revealed that no student with whom tutors worked seemed willing to venture too far from the professor's expectations on an assignment. This finding relates to students' desires to meet institutional demands for writing and their awareness of the consequences for not doing so, which I explain earlier in this chapter. Also clear is how tutors attempted to alleviate students' apprehension about moving beyond professors' expectations, at least initially, in order to increase students' connection to the writing and the decisions regarding the writing. If a student reported being unable to answer an assignment, the tutor attempted to uncover the reasons for that belief. If, during that conversation, the tutor identified something the student already did well, the tutor encouraged the student to focus their attention on doing more of that. If a student

revealed that they might be able to answer the assignment in another way that deviated from the professor's expectations, then the tutor encouraged them to do that. If a student indicated that they had never been allowed to use first-person in an assignment before or to go beyond five paragraphs, the tutor tried to assure them that one or both were appropriate for most college writing assignments. If the student expressed uncertainty about how academic or "American" their work sounded, then the tutor attempted to dissuade them from writing in a way that sounded like someone else. If the student feared saying what they really thought in a paper, the tutor encouraged them to express themselves and showed them how to substantiate their ideas. But the tutors who described these attempts also described how they failed, and the consistency among these failings points to why tutors sometimes question the value of what they do. The source of tutors' feelings of failure reinforce the need for writing centers to work more closely with faculty across the disciplines to inform them of best practices in both instruction and assessment.

Theme 4. A tutor's practice is affected by their ideologies and other identities. This study's first research question raises questions about the effects of institutionalized demands on tutors' practices, agency during the session, and identities as students and tutors. From analysis of the interviews, it is clear that there is a relationship between demands and how tutors see themselves as students and tutors. But in the interviews, tutors also described other factors that affected their tutoring practice. Among those factors were the tutors' own ideologies and identities; even more specific among the factors that tutors mentioned were their race, culture, idiolect, religion, sex, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. These factors constitute

the “other stuff” to which Gee (2005) referred in his discussion of factors that affect discursive practice among community members. They also complicated tutors’ responses to students’ requests for help.

In all of the interviews, tutors commented on the degree to which their identities and ideologies affected their responses to students’ writing during the tutoring sessions. As the transcripts revealed, the tutor’s own ideology and standards for what constitutes an “academic” paper or what is appropriate or inappropriate to say in a paper becomes part of the institutional demands that students experience. As tutors indicated, at times, their responses to students’ papers stemmed from their awareness of how specific professors will respond to certain viewpoints. However, tutors spoke frankly about how their own ideologies, which some tutors directly attributed to personal experience and one or more identity markers, informed their responses to papers they characterized as offensive. Among the identity markers that tutors mentioned were age, race, class, culture, idiolect, religion, sex, and gender.

The majority of the papers tutors characterized as offensive were those that were overtly racist or sexist. However, tutors also described their responses to papers that were critical of gays and lesbians, immigrants, religious liberals or conservatives, or individuals who practiced a religion that the student criticized. Among the papers tutors described were those where the student expressed strong opinions or made claims that were inadequately and inappropriately supported. As the transcripts revealed, tutors’ responses to papers they found offensive fell along a continuum. On one end of the continuum were tutors who described how they set aside their own ideologies and simply helped the student write the most persuasive “offensive” paper.

On the other end of the continuum was one tutor who was so offended by what the student wrote that they asked another tutor to take over the session. The majority of the tutors who commented on these papers, however, made no mention of setting aside their ideologies. They described their attempts to help the writer meet the expectations of the assignment by making sure they could support their claims with credible sources; in five groups, tutors described how they also challenged the student to think about how their readers might consider their words.

Though I did not ask tutors to explain their responses to students' papers, many acknowledged the relationship between their responses and their personal experiences, including factors related to their identities within and outside the writing center. Among the identity markers to which tutors most often referred were their own race, religion, language, sex, and gender. I'll discuss tutors' notions of how these markers influenced their work with students in Chapter Five.

Though several tutors described their responses to papers that were overtly racist, only two graduate student tutors were among those who commented on the relationship between their race and their response to those papers. That is, they stated that their responses to racist papers stemmed from their own experiences as members of a racial minority. To them, a racist paper was one marked by racist diction (i.e. the N-word or another derivation) or claims that were racist, stereotypical, otherwise inappropriate, and unsubstantiated. However, one tutor who also served as a teaching assistant in the English department commented on their awareness of how faculty, especially faculty of color, would respond to the student's diction or unsubstantiated claims.

Another category of papers tutors described as offensive were those where the author used religion as a basis for arguing for or against a controversial topic or for praising or criticizing one or more religions or the religious views of individuals or groups of people. Of those tutors who described these papers and their response to them, only one self-identified their religion as a factor in their responses. This tutor did not mention their religion to justify their response to the student but to acknowledge how their own religious views, when expressed, may lead others to judge them. In other words, the tutor used the sessions with students whose religious convictions offended them to reflect on how their own religious convictions, when expressed, might offend others.

The majority of tutors who described working with students whose papers were offensive described papers that contained ideas that could be understood as sexist or homophobic. As the transcripts revealed, tutors described sessions with students who self-identified as supporting those ideas. Among the identity markers students referred to in conversations with tutors were their sex, gender, ethnicity, and religion. That is, when tutors asked students to explain their ideas, students would respond by referring to how one or more of those identity markers related to the ideas they presented in their papers. While tutors certainly referred to how one or more of those identity markers affected their response to these papers, they most often referred to how their sex or gender affected their responses.

The interview transcripts also included descriptions of how tutors' age affected their response to students and their papers. Among tutors were those who said that their age helped them to respond to students' papers and requests for help;

others felt their age might have played a factor in a session that did not go well. For example, one graduate student tutor referred to how their age helped them to challenge the younger students to think through a biased argument. Three other graduate student tutors referred to how their age helped them relate to the struggles of both traditional and non-traditional students. As one tutor described, their age helped them encourage younger students to go back to their professors for further clarification of comments on a paper or expectations for an assignment. That same tutor described how his age helped him build non-traditional students' confidence in themselves. Other graduate student tutors who described how their age helped them respond to students' requests saw it as a positive. Younger, undergraduate tutors, however, spoke about the challenges of tutoring older students, including other undergraduate, upper-division students.

Socioeconomic status was mentioned by one tutor as an influence on her reaction to working with students who self-identified as graduates of an inner-city school that had lost its accreditation. The tutor self-identified as coming from an upper-middle class background and described how her school prepared her for the rigors of college. She surmised a relationship between the socioeconomic status of students, their prior school experiences, and the degree to which they were prepared for college. Other tutors in her group agreed with her assessment.

Results of the Self-Assessment Inventories

All tutors were given a self-assessment inventory that included two parts. Part One asked tutors to rank order five statements in order to indicate what they are most interested in accomplishing when working with a writer:

- fulfilling the writer's needs and goals for their own writing;
- fulfilling the assignment's/professor's expectations for writing;
- fulfilling training and/or the director's expectations for working with writers;
- fulfilling my own expectations of how best to achieve the writer's needs and goals; and
- fulfilling other expectations of what good writing is (tutors were asked to list the expectations that came to mind).

Part Two asked tutors to select from among 20 adjectives those that 1) best described them as a tutor, or 2) did not describe them as a tutor. All but three of the adjectives were drawn from leading tutor training manuals, other literature from the writing center field, or from my own experience as a writing center tutor and director. The three additional adjectives, *standards-oriented*, *conventional*, and *authoritative*, related to the research questions for this study and stood in contrast to other adjectives taken from the literature. Tutors could also write in adjectives that described them. Upon the suggestion of one of the tutors in the first group, I also encouraged tutors to qualify the adjectives, adding comments regarding the contextual nature of when an adjective might or might not apply.

Results of the rank ordering of priorities. Fifty-one of the 56 (or 91 percent) of the tutors rank-ordered the statements of priority when working with a writer. Analysis revealed that all but three tutors believed their priority was to fulfill the writers' needs and goals for their own writing, which tutors are often trained to do. The three exceptions ranked that priority as their second priority behind fulfilling

the assignment's or professor's expectations, which the majority of tutors chose as their second priority. Most tutors ranked fulfilling the expectations of their tutor training or director for working with writers as their third priority and fulfilling their own expectations of how best to achieve the writers' needs and goals as their fourth. Tutors ranked fulfilling other expectations of what good writing is as their last priority. They were asked to write in what those expectations were, and those expectations were among the institutional demands to which tutors referred in the interviews or narratives. The similarities across the interviews, self-assessments, and narratives point to several consistencies among tutors' views about what they see during writing center sessions, how they view their priorities, and how they approach their work. Those consistencies also reflect the fine line that tutors described between the perceived dichotomy between institutional goals and personal goals for writing. That is, tutors know, because they are students, that among students' personal goals for writing is the desire to meet institutional, standard demands.

Results of the self-assessment and inventory. The self-assessment was completed by 51 of the 56 tutors (or 91 percent). Table 1 shows the number and percentage of tutors who chose each descriptor as one that best described them as tutors. These totals include those adjectives that tutors qualified. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of tutors who identified words that did not characterize them as tutors, including those they qualified.

Across all tables, tutors' qualifying comments include those that:

- described situations during which the adjective described their tutoring practice;

- defined the adjective, according to the tutor's understanding of its application to their tutoring practice;
- offered the degree to which the tutor attempted to be _____, depending on the situation; and
- raised questions about the adjective's denotative and connotative meanings.

What words best describe me as a tutor? Of the 56 tutor participants, 51 completed the portion of the self-assessment inventory that asked them to circle the adjectives that they felt described them as tutors. Tutors could write in qualifying statements for the adjectives. Table 1 shows the results of their selections in descending order. Table 2 shows the results of words tutors believed did not describe them as a tutor. Following Table 2 is discussion of what these tables indicate about how tutors describe themselves. In Chapter Five, I compare these findings to others drawn from the coded interviews and tutors' written narrative responses.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Tutors Who Felt the Adjective Described Them

Adjective	Number and Percentage of Tutors Who Chose the Word	
Friendly	45	88%
Good, active listener	44	86%
Personable	41	86%
Patient	41	86%
Conversational	39	76%
Approachable	39	76%

Anti-racist	37	72%
Writer-oriented	37	72%
Curious	35	67%
Participatory	35	67%
Reflective	35	67%

N=51.

Analysis of the tutors' selections indicate the following results:

- Each adjective was chosen by at least six tutors.
- Among the adjectives most tutors felt described them were five that none of the 51 tutors selected as adjectives that did not describe them (*good, active listener; friendly; personable; approachable; and writer-oriented*).
- The adjectives chosen by 43% or more of the tutors as adjectives that described them contrast with those adjectives chosen by 71% or fewer (*directive, non-directive, standards-oriented, conventional, and authoritative*).
- The five lowest ranked adjectives are the same five that were ranked at the top of adjectives on the "these adjectives do not describe me" list (*directive, non-directive, standards-oriented, conventional, and authoritative*).

What words do not describe me as a tutor? The 51 tutors who completed the self-assessment inventory crossed out words that did not describe them as a tutor; they could also write in qualifying statements for their selections. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of tutors who crossed out words that did not describe them as tutors. Of note are five words that were not crossed out by any of the tutors. That is, all tutors felt they were *good, active listeners, friendly, personable, approachable,*

and *writer-oriented*. Table 1 shows that these words were among the top-ranked adjectives that tutors felt described them.

Table 2.

Number and Percentage of Tutors Who Felt the Adjective Did Not Describe Them

Adjective	Number and Percentage of Tutors Who Chose the Word	
Authoritative	36	71%
Conventional	25	49%
Standards-oriented	20	40%
Non-Directive	13	25%
Directive	9	18%
Democratic	6	12%
Confident	4	8%
Happy	3	6%

N=51.

Words that tutors did not choose but commented on. Tutors provided comments for but did not select words that did or did not describe them. Those words include conventional; democratic; standards-oriented; non-directive; anti-racist; directive; writer-oriented; non-directive; thorough; and confident. The majority of tutors' comments about those words indicated uncertainty of their meaning.

Analysis of inventory data across tables. Analysis of each table indicates several consistencies related to the writing center field's general descriptions of good tutoring practices. Combined, the tables also suggest consistencies with comments made by the tutors during the interviews about their approach to helping writers meet institutionalized demands for writing. Chapter Five offers a discussion of how

conclusions drawn from the analysis of the self-assessment inventories help to answer the research questions.

Results from E-mailed Narrative Prompts

All 56 tutors who participated in the study were asked to write a response to an e-mailed prompt that carried the following question:

Think about how you were taught to write and are now expected to write for an academic audience. What do you think was effective and ineffective? How is your experience reflected (or not reflected) in the work you do as a writing tutor?

I e-mailed the prompt to all tutors after the interviews with instructions that they could answer the prompt in as many or as few words as they liked. Reminder e-mails were sent to the tutors who had not returned their responses; the last reminder was sent on May 1, 2009. In total, 30 of the 56 tutors (54 percent) responded to the prompt. Responses ranged from one paragraph to several single-spaced pages. One tutor submitted a ten page, double-spaced paper previously submitted for a course, which they believed answered the prompt.

Summary of analysis of tutors' narrative responses. Analysis of tutors' narratives indicate the following:

- Each of the 30 respondents believed that their writing instruction affected their tutoring praxis.
- All 30 tutors described how they use, adapt, or resist academic standards when working with students in the writing center.

- Twenty-nine tutors mentioned the degree to which their K-12 writing instruction affected them as college writers and, consequently, their tutoring praxis; most often mentioned were the positive and negative influences of the five-paragraph essay, timed writings for Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and grammar instruction.
- Three tutors mentioned never having received formal composition instruction in high school; those who took and received credit for AP courses also mentioned the effects of that credit on their first- and second-year college writing experiences.
- Three tutors said that students must learn the standard rules for writing before they can break free of them.
- Five tutors attributed success or failure with writing to reading skills.
- Seven tutors referred to themselves as creative writers, and described how their high school instruction did not offer them opportunities to write creatively. They also discussed how their work as creative writers affects their tutoring praxis.
- Seventeen tutors described both positive and negative influences of peers, parents, and teachers on their learning to write for academic audiences.

While 29 tutors described how their prior writing instruction (primarily in high school) affected their approaches to tutoring, three tutors' experiences stood out as exceptions. One was prevented from attending high school and, therefore, received no instruction in writing for an academic audience until after they had published their own works of fiction. Another tutor described the bilingual nature of their writing

instruction in high school and the degree to which they used the techniques of their high school English teacher alongside their first language during the writing center session. Another exceptional case arose when one tutor self-identified as a basic writer who twice failed a basic writing course, but who is now in a graduate English composition program.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss the tutors' responses in more detail and relate them to the research questions for this study. Briefly, tutors' responses do indicate a relationship between their learning to write experiences and their tutoring praxis. Tutors described the degree to which they use, adapt, or resist what they learned when they work with writers. Tutors' descriptions offer additional insight into student writers' approaches to writing. Those insights add students' voices to the conversations held about the effects of institutional demands for writing on students' work, agency, and identities.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this study, I have argued that reports of the effects of standardization of writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning have been limited; to better know the depth and breadth of those effects, it is better to ask students about their impact. I have also claimed that writing centers occupy a strategically vital position in the field of composition studies because tutors' experiences with standardization offer researchers two lenses through which to view the effects of institutionalized demands for writing on students' work, agency, and identities.

In this chapter, I present tutors' perspectives on how institutionalized writing instruction and assessment affect their own and other students' work, agency, and identities. My conclusions are based on analyses of the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students who served as writing center tutors in 16 two- and four-year colleges and universities. Between 2007 and 2009, 56 tutors provided their perspectives in interviews, self-assessment inventories, and written narratives. Through those sources, I was able to identify information that answers the study's research questions and fulfills the study's purpose. In this chapter, I further detail my interpretation of the results and suggest implications for scholars and educators in the fields of writing centers, composition, and education.

From my experience in conducting this study for the past three years, it is clear that writing center tutors possess keen insights into the cultural norms of writing imposed upon students. They speak with clarity and fervor on the topic of institutional demands for writing and their impact on both students' and tutors' work,

agency, and identities. Writing center tutors' comments reveal the demands most often imposed on writers and the consequences for meeting or not meeting them. I discuss these findings in detail in Chapter Four. Tutors also reveal the many ways they try to help writers negotiate demands that limit the possibility for students to have personal goals for writing other than meeting the demands. Furthermore, tutors point to how demands limited students' ability to see writing as a process rather than a product. As a result, students remained disconnected from writing, from effective composing strategies, and from perceptions of themselves as writers. These tutors' insights are critical to educators and scholars in the composition and writing center fields who wish to understand the impact of institutional demands for writing on teaching and learning, especially on how professors' assignments, assessments, and interactions with students affect their students' motivations, composing processes, and success as writers. Findings from this study may also be of interest to educationists and K-12 educators who examine the effects of national policy standards on teaching and learning, which tutors acknowledged influence curriculum, instruction, and assessment in secondary and post-secondary schools.

This study advances the call by scholars for research that points to how writing center tutors increase the potential for change in the classroom (see Bruffee, Kail, Lunsford, Villanueva, Grimm, and Dean). My findings reveal several ways that change could occur in both secondary and post-secondary classrooms. Tutors' descriptions of students' reactions to demands imposed upon them indicate some of the ways that instruction and assessment need to change, including how instructors design and assess writing assignments and how they interact with students. Tutors'

descriptions of writing center sessions point to students' reactions to expectations, including but not limited to students' understanding of those demands and their effects on students' composing processes. Further revealed are the ways in which the consequences of meeting or not meeting those demands affect students' agency in their own learning and perceptions of themselves as writers and members of discourse communities to which they belong and aspire to join. Tutors' awareness of institutionalized demands for writing instruction and assessment reinforce what scholars who criticize standardization already know, but the addition of students' experiences may add another line of defense against those outside the composition and education fields who make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Finally, tutors' insights may help steer instructional policies and methods away from product-oriented approaches to student-centered, process-oriented approaches.

Research Questions

This study reveals the effects of institutional demands for writing on students and tutors. The rationale for using writing center tutors as participants came from an awareness that, through their dual institutional status as both student and tutor, tutors are not only "objects" of the institutional expectations imposed on them but "subjects" in the imposition of those expectations on others. Consequently, tutors' dual roles offer scholars two lenses through which to view the effects of standards on students' work, agency, and identities. Primary to this study is tutors' naming of the demands with which they are familiar as students and as tutors. Also important are

what tutors' reflections say about the degree to which they and students appropriate, adapt, or resist those demands.

In this chapter, I divide my discussion of the findings between the two research questions that frame this study:

1. To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities, including:
 1. how tutors define institutional demands for writing;
 2. the agency tutors feel they have in helping writers improve;
 3. the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities; and
 4. the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.
2. In what critical ways might tutors' reflections add to the narrative conversations of reform taking place in the composition and assessment fields?

Discussion

The Effects of Standardized Demands for Writing on Tutors and Students

Results from three data sources point to the many ways that standardized demands for writing affect tutors' praxis, agency, and identities. In the following sections, I discuss each finding as they relate to the first research question and the study's aim. I include discussion of how tutors define institutional demands for writing, focusing on six categories of standard demands most often mentioned by

tutors. I provide tutors' descriptions of sessions and tutors' commentary on the demands' effects on students' writing, agency, and identities. Tutors' approaches to students' requests for help point to the degree to which tutors helped students appropriate, adapt, or resist the demands imposed upon them. Throughout the discussion are tutors' insights into how standards and cultural norms for writing emerge from and are perpetuated by society, the academy, and the individual.

Tutors' definitions of institutional demands. In their written reflections and in the interviews, tutors demonstrated a keen awareness of the institutional demands for writing imposed upon students and the effects of those demands on students' writing, agency in their own learning, and identities. Tutors named the standard demands for writing and assessment that have become institutionalized over time. They also named the origins of those demands and the consequences of meeting and not meeting them. Finally, they name the strategies they employed to help students decide the degree to which they wanted to accept, adapt, or resist the demands imposed upon them. For tutors and students, and for the purposes of this study, this naming is significant because it afforded tutors access to the "biographical, ideological, and historical situatedness" that Giroux claims gets lost with standardization (1993, p. 3).

In the interviews, tutors were quick to name standard demands for writing imposed upon students. To probe tutors' knowledge of those demands, I began each interview by asking tutors to offer their thoughts on Cooper's (1994/2008) assertion that tutors should help writers negotiate between institutional demands and their own personal goals for writing. Tutors first began answering the question by offering their

notions of foundational demands that stemmed from societal, cultural, or academic expectations of how educated people speak, write, and think. The characterizations tutors offered included, among others, the need for all students to speak and to write in Standard English, conform to the language of academic discourse, and to present their writing and perspectives in ways deemed acceptable by others. Ken, a tutor at South Central University, noted how demands trickled down to “professor’s expectations regarding writing, [creating] the myth of an ideal that is out there, that the student has done right.”

Beginning with the very first interview, tutors demonstrated their expertise in naming institutional demands for writing and the ways in which they affect students. Larissa, a tutor at Northcentral University, began by defining institutional demands as “the language of academic discourse, Bartholomae’s ‘Inventing the University’ and this prefabricated way that we’re supposed to...write in...how traditionally or institutionally [a student’s writing] would be more technically phrased.” She went on to point to “university ideals for students,” to which her colleague Ned added “guidelines to follow and basic ideas of what the professor would like, a professor’s strict academic expectations.” Another tutor added the notion that universities also have traditions and conventions that tend to govern what individual professors expect and what students could write or think. This finding resonated across other interview groups, as well. Mira, a tutor from Commonwealth University noted how “the rules of society” influence “the things that are specifically put into place by the university...the standards.” Her colleague Diandra described one aspect of these

standards as “the sort of standardized writing style that students often have to adhere to...just having levels of standardization and working within those bounds.”

Across the interviews, tutors referred to these and other standard demands for writing. Among the most often mentioned were guidelines that pertained to language, grammar, form, style, topic, and point-of-view. In the following sections, I present tutors’ descriptions of the demands, thoughts on how the demands affected students, and attempts to help students work through, with, or against those demands to become successful writers.

Grammar. Tutors identified grammar as the most prevalent institutional demand imposed upon writers. In every interview group, tutors described sessions with students who asked for a “grammar check.” Accompanying these requests at times were documents from professors, an assignment sheet or feedback on a paper; those materials often indicated the importance of grammar to the student’s grade, especially for first-year writers. Though not all tutors reported seeing materials, Alaine, a tutor at New Central University, described “a list of grammar errors...that [students] needed to address in their work.” She went on to describe how all freshmen at their university “have a piece of paper saying what they need to write about for their assignment that will also say ‘Watch For’ and [gives] a list of grammar mistakes.” Alaine observed that the list appeared on the document before requirements for other features of the paper, which she found to be more important than grammar: Content and Thesis. Tutors reported fielding similar requests from students across all grade levels and disciplines.

Tutors posited that grammar was an institutional demand for writing that students attempted to meet, oftentimes at the expense of higher order concerns. Tutors' responses to requests for grammar checks varied, depending on several factors. Tutors offered the grammar check if the student insisted, or if the paper appeared to be well-developed and well-organized. But most of the tutors, drawing from their own work as writers and their writing center training, tried to steer students toward writing process and global concerns in the paper. Dalia, from Atlantic University, described her work with a student who arrived with a finished draft and said, "I really need help on my grammar. I'm really just here for checking that." Careen, a graduate student tutor from Atlantic University described working with students in a 300 level course:

The teacher said that two grammar errors got you a C or lower and three failed. So I tutored a number of [students in that class] and told them we can't promise to catch everything. I told them I was also looking for bigger issues. And then on another occasion, a student came to me to try to get me to justify his grammar choices because his instructor had counted two mistakes and given him a C....

Careen used this example to note the importance of grades to students and how some professors' emphasis on grammar in assessing students' writing affected students' priorities when writing.

It's frustrating because on one hand, the institution seems to have established a relationship with the individual students [that is] a kind of grading relationship. I mean, that's the relationship a student has with the institution,

and they feel that that kind of gets in the way of their journey to become a better writer. That kind of gets in the way of our project to help [a student] become a better writer because they'll come with a sheet like that that says "comma splice" and this or that, and really, we're also here to talk about content and argument and everything like that. And so, sometimes, it is a kind of struggle to talk about those things in addition to what they think will get them an A or what their teacher has given them to clue them into a good grade or how they got a good grade.

Dalia, Careen's colleague, echoed her frustration with a particular instructor's emphasis on grammar when assigning grades to students' papers. "I remember the instructor," Dalia began. "I do remember that. It's very frustrating for us because if we don't catch all their grammar mistakes, it's our fault that they got a worse grade." Careen and Dalia describe how pressure to turn in grammatically perfect papers transforms the writing center session into one marked by frustration for both student and tutor. Clearly, that pressure is increased when so much of a student's grade rides on the number of grammar errors committed.

As I note in Chapter Four, students understandably focus their attention on what they believe is important to their grades. If professors give students the impression that as few as three grammar errors will result in a poor grade, students will focus their attention on grammar and ignore the more important aspects of writing to which tutors attempt to draw their attention during a session (i.e. thesis, organization, development, revision). Tutors will also be unable to steer students toward effective composing strategies that are appropriate for the student. To borrow

from Bordieu (1991), tutors will remain unable to legitimate more important concerns and more effective strategies in students' minds because professors do not give them legitimacy when informing students what will affect their grades the most. Clearly, tutors' observations and evaluation of what students are asked to do suggests that if students are to become more successful as writers, a cultural change must occur in classrooms across the disciplines where writing is assigned and graded, and writing center tutors should be engaged in this as representatives of students who, according to the tutors, would rather resort to ineffective means to meet an assignment's demands than approach their professors to ask questions. If and when they do become informed of these realities, professors' reflective practice may not be enough to effect change. Later in this chapter, I offer specific ideas for how change might occur.

Tutors expressed various degrees of frustration, confusion, and anger when students asked for help in understanding a professor's comments about grammar on their papers. Tutors described seeing papers with comments about grammar that outnumbered any other comments, including those the tutor felt might have been more helpful, such as whether or not a paper met the assignment or was well-developed or well-organized. Tutors found professors' comments largely focused on sentence-level errors, if they pointed to any specific errors at all.

Only one tutor, Nora, spoke uncritically about this when she said, "I have a lot of students who come from [the area K-12 school district], and I don't mean to sound mean, but the single-worst paper in terms of grammar came from a native speaker from that school district. [Their] grammar and syntax were so bad, I couldn't

understand what [they were] trying to convey in the paper.” In that case, Nora could not see past the grammar errors to address other concerns.

I think [they were] trying to adhere to this academic style in a way. It was really hard to communicate, and I guess that’s one of the sessions where I felt most at a loss because I couldn’t talk to [the student] about the biggest issues in the paper without going through the grammar because it was just so bad, so nonstandard, I guess. I couldn’t get through it. But it seems like a lot of students from [that district] just have...they don’t have a very good basis in writing.

While Nora found it necessary to focus on obvious grammar errors in her student’s paper, other tutors described being confounded by cryptic comments by professors about errors that neither tutor nor student could pinpoint. For example, tutors found comments about grammar sometimes too general, as when “incorrect grammar” is written in the margins or elsewhere on the paper without further explanation or example. These comments meant that the tutor and student spent a considerable amount of time trying to determine what was incorrect, which further obstructed the tutor’s goal of pointing the student’s attention to process and global concerns. Finally, tutors described instances when professors marked grammar errors that were not errors, or when students asked tutors to justify a professor’s marks. As tutors who described these moments indicated, they often encouraged the students to consult the professor, sometimes coaching them in what to ask. Four of the tutors said they consulted the professors themselves; of those four, two served as writing fellows who helped faculty develop assignments and assessment tools.

American academic English. Tutors in every group referred to the expectation that all students write in what they referred to as *Standard English* or *American English*, the latter designation coming from professors' comments on students' papers.

The expectation to demonstrate mastery of the use of academic English proved especially challenging for English Language Learners (ELLs). In every interview, tutors described working with students whom they characterized as second language users, refugee students, English as Second Language users (ESLs) and English Language Learners (ELLs). Tutors reported working with students who came to the United States to attend university, to escape hardship in their home countries, or to reside in the United States with their families. In addition, tutors described students who were born in the United States or whose family emigrated to the United States while the students were children but whose home language was not English. From the tutors' descriptions of several students' proficiency in spoken English, it is clear that the proficiency ranged from basic to conversational to near-native proficiency. Like other students, most ELLs came to the writing center as a result of a professor's suggestion or requirement; others came to practice skills with spoken or written English or to get help with assigned reading or other texts, such as emails, letters, or newspapers.

Tutors' sessions with ELLs centered largely around professors' comments, which often suggested that professors held ELL students to different standards. At times, professors' comments struck the tutors as inappropriate or unfair, suggesting that ELL students were held to higher standards or to no standards at all. Larsen,

whose writing center serves a diverse student body, said that he saw ELL students' papers with no marks or comments from professors to indicate obvious errors. Neena, a tutor from Southern Pacific University, described just the opposite, when pointing to comments that were "mean and heartbreaking" for both student and tutor. Neena's colleague Shaila described what she observed.

Non-native speakers are held to a different standard than native speakers—same professor, same prompt—and non-native speakers are brutalized versus native speakers, who are not.

Jeremy, who tutored the student whose professor wrote only, "This needs to be in idiomatic English," added how unrealistic some professors' expectations were.

I'm never quite sure about the expectations on ESL students from their professors. And there again, it probably varies. I feel like...some instructors will allow an accented writing, something that clearly does not look like standard academic English.... I found it kind of unfair and stupid for an instructor to expect someone who wasn't born and raised in America to write like an American: "Go to the writing center where they'll teach you to write like you've lived here all your life." That doesn't make any sense.

Jeremy's colleague, Terrence, who self-identified as an ELL from another country, noted that more professors need to know that ELLs' learning curve is approximately two years, after which time clarity in their work will increase and sentence level errors will decrease.

Tutors' responses to ELLs depended largely on three factors, I found. The first was the degree to which the institution valued diversity; Rileigh, from Heartland

University, described their college as “very understanding” of differences, an understanding that permeated the ranks, and one that tutors modeled in the writing center. The second factor was the writing center’s reputation on campus as an advocate for students rather than an extension of the institution’s voice. One tutor from Southern Pacific University said their tutors were trained and encouraged to help writers challenge the institution’s expectations, and their director and assistant director supported them in doing so. Other tutors also credited their training and administrators’ support for their attempts to work against institutional attempts to, as Oleisa described, “mold ELLs into what they wanted.”

When responding to ELLs’ requests, many tutors echoed Rileigh’s description of tutors’ attempts to “focus less on the usual prescriptions of institutional writing....” For some tutors, this meant contacting professors directly, especially if tutors worked on campuses where diversity was valued and with directors who “had their backs.” Two tutors from New Central University described their roles as writing fellows, assigned to work with faculty on all aspects of writing assignments and assessments; those tutors had no problem contacting professors directly, and they reported how professors admit to being unaware of how their comments affect students or how best to teach ELLs. Other tutors who contacted professors did so because, as classroom writing teachers, they felt they had the institutional authority to do so. Experience also played a role in a tutor’s decision to contact a professor; undergraduate tutors, especially those new to their jobs, were the least likely to contact professors on their own.

Tutors described very specific approaches to working with ELL students, and many of those strategies were the same or similar to those used with other students. Tutors described taking notes during the session for students, taking extra time to explain to students their options, and helping the student identify and then to build on what they did well. Larissa, a graduate tutor from Northcentral University, said her approach was designed to help the ELL student see the choices they could make as a writer.

Students have their own ways of speaking and writing, and...without damaging their voice in any way, I try to tell them what the academic construction would be and present that option for them.... I don't want to force them into an identity they aren't ready to assume or force them into writing according to a set of standards. I like them to take baby steps.

Acknowledging that what the ELL has written is meaningful, Larissa addresses the students' differences in a less subtractive light. She helps them to realize that their differences are not bad—they're just differences.

Larsen, who tutored on a diverse, urban campus, explained how many of the ELL students who sought his help were "amazing" at myriad aspects of writing, yet they received failing grades on academic papers. His general approach with all writers was to help them improve by building on what they did well. He found this particularly helpful with ELL writers.

I always try to find that little kernel and build from that instead of looking at the...problems that they have. And just grow from whatever their strengths

are—outward—so they can just keep on building.... The burden of [their] problems becomes easier when they become confident in their own strengths.

While largely successful, Larsen admitted that his approach did not work with students who did not believe in their own strengths or felt a particular skill was inappropriate for an academic paper. Larsen referred to several sessions with a Chinese student who wrote vivid imagery, adding that “Whatever he was expressing through his writing, I could *be* there.” But when the student came to the writing center for help on a more traditional, academic paper, one that he had failed, he resisted Larsen’s suggestion to add imagery and detail to his writing. As Larsen told him, “If your intention is for a grade, I’m here for your writing. ... I’m going to help you with your writing.” In other sessions with this and other ELL students, Larsen mentioned that he also often used the linguistic nuances of the ELL’s language to help them learn to write. For example, Larsen knew that verb tenses were not used in the Chinese language, so during another session with this student, using verb tenses in academic papers became the focus.

ELLs’ linguistic and cultural differences made them less likely to try something they thought might threaten their grade or their relationship with professors. Zia, a tutor from Southcentral University, described the enculturation of undergraduate students who must “learn this voice, appropriate this voice, and put on something that really isn’t theirs” in order to fit in their new academic setting. Zia’s colleagues found this particularly true for students from racial, linguistic, and cultural minorities, including ELLs. Una, Zia’s colleague, noted how those students do not yet know how to negotiate a place for themselves in the academy, and some do not feel

like they have the authority to do so. As a result, their goal becomes one driven by their notions of what it takes to be successful, including but not limited to the mastery of academic or American English.

As Terrence noted, length of time in an American institution plays a factor in ELLs' skills in using academic English, but so do the institutional demands for writing that students bring from other countries. Nora, a tutor who worked with Conservatory students at Midwestern University, found ELLs in their first year of study in the United States. They found writing in academic English especially hard because, prior to attending an American university, they were not required to write.

They are graduate students and expected to write on the graduate level, and they don't have their basic grammar and syntax learned. And I can think of a specific professor who just writes in big red at the top of the paper, "Poor writing. Go to the writing center." And so they come in very upset already. They've gotten a C or a D on their first paper. There's no way for them to bring their grade up to an A. They're freaking out.

Nadia, a tutor from Rocky Mountain Community College, pointed to another institutional demand tied directly to an ELLs' prior experience: plagiarism. Nadia worked with ELLs whose prior academic and cultural experiences led them to adopt limited views of their own authority as writers.

The idea of plagiarism is foreign to [some students] because they're not allowed, not encouraged to think for themselves, to analyze on their own, and to actually interpret [others' words and] the meaning behind them. So that's one cultural standardization.... I had to counter by explaining to them what

plagiarism is, and this is America, and your opinions are needed, are encouraged, and if you do not [share them], then you will not pass this assignment. You will fail. And your teacher may...fail you in the course if you plagiarize.

What Nadia's reflection points to is her awareness that plagiarism is a culturally-constructed concept with which ELL students may be unfamiliar. Not only does Nadia attempt to acculturate ELLs to the expectations of an American college or university, thereby helping them to meet an institutional demand, she teaches the students important skills (i.e. interpretation, paraphrasing, and synthesis) that, over time, will help them take on the identity of a thinker and writer in an American institution.

Structure and content, also culturally-constructed demands for writing, affected ELLs, too. Cameron, a community college tutor, described how structures of organization posed challenges for ELLs.

[One complication arises from the] perception of linear presentation or linear thought, right? especially from students who are from narrative based cultures. It makes no sense to them whatsoever that you give a thesis statement, substantiate this with evidence and restate the thesis in the conclusion. And when they give their understanding of linear presentation or linear communication, they do make sense. They're just not [using] the paradigm that we use.... They have ways that they've been taught that work. We just don't accept them.

Just as genre and its culturally bound rhetorical features challenged ELLs, so too did content requirements linked to genre expectations. The personal narrative proved particularly challenging for students who came from cultures where students rarely wrote from the first person point-of-view. The narrative also challenged refugee students, as Cameron describes.

I personally worked with at least six of these Sudanese lost boys, and all of these people have stories that are incredibly traumatic. Being in a new culture, being in an academic scenario that is *completely* foreign to them, they feel very...inferior in a way. They're trying to do things the right way. They're given assignments like this and don't feel they can say, "There are some things I don't feel comfortable writing about." And they tend to default to these things that are very traumatic. There have been a number of sessions that I've conducted where students have ended up in tears, and I know from working with them that they didn't want to cover this. They felt that it was expectation.

Exacerbating the students' feelings of inferiority was their minimal experience speaking or reading English. Since their refugee status meant they were not required to take ESL courses, students work in a first-year composition course was "unbelievably hard," as Claudia described, placing the student in what Cameron characterized as an "untenable position." He went on to describe the risk of suggesting ESL classes to these students: "[Students] perceive that you are stereotyping them or consigning them to a specific role." He then explained that the fallback is to help them with language acquisition, which tutors willingly do, but

“with the full knowledge that there is no chance that what [they’re] doing is going to result in [the student] passing the class.”

While most tutors identified ELL students who came to the writing center under pressure to meet the demands of an assignment, there were also ELLs who came to improve their listening, speaking, or reading skills. As students, tutors knew that those skills are recursive with writing skills, and because tutors are not only trained but inclined to help all students develop one or more literacy skills, tutors reported finding themselves willing to serve as writing tutor, language teacher, or reading instructor, whatever the student needed. Cameron described the overlap between the writing center’s services and other resources on his community college’s campus.

While there is a reading lab on campus, and while there is an ESL lab on campus, the definition of where our job ends and their job begins is very fluid, and what we find is that for a number of different reasons..., we have a number of students who come to us for reading comprehension help or ESL help rather than writing help. And how do you turn them away? And we have instructors who send these students to us as well, and because it’s so difficult to put a definition on what our mandate is, we try to help everybody.

Tutors from other institutions also worked with students on reading, listening, and speaking skills. At times, students’ desire to improve those skills came as a result of what many tutors characterized as “self-induced pressure.” JJ, a tutor at Midwestern University, described a graduate student who visited the center up to three times per week for over three years. JJ described the student, whom I will call Paul, in this way.

He listens to NPR and Rush Limbaugh.... He pushes himself and goes well above and beyond the things he could have to do in order to be able to write. He would schedule sessions with me and take those words and phrases that he heard off the radio, and we would just go through them. He would listen to me pronounce them. He would write down what they mean. I would try to explain the colloquialisms if they were unclear. He would ask, "So is this something I can use in academic writing, or is this something I would just use in conversation? Would it be appropriate to use it in this way?" Just over and over again. He came to [learn English] so late that he has real trouble with it in some sense, but he also just works at it like a machine sometimes. It's almost terrifying to think about doing something that way.

JJ's use of the word "terrifying" elicited nervous laughter from his colleagues, but it is an appropriate word to use to describe ELLs' and other students' fears of failure. Like the other students whom tutors described, Paul's tenacity may be an extreme, but it points to how the anxiety to earn desired grades and acceptance becomes visible during sessions in the writing center. Rena noted how Paul's hard work paid off over time. She contrasted his experience with other ELL students'.

I would say with a lot of ELL students, more with undergraduate or masters students than with Ph.D. students, they'll write very simply, whereas I felt that he was always trying to write in sort of a grand manner. I never worked with him where he was just listing off words, but he would bring in e-mails to me that he was going to send, letters, not necessarily essays or papers.... We would sort of go through [them], and [they were not written] exactly in

Standard English, and he would list off multiple ways to correct [them], saying, “If I used this phrase or this word...,” and a lot of times,...sentences would get restructured not because I pointed [them] out, but because he decided to say [them] differently.

Cameron, JJ, and Rena indicate that writing centers have become sites where tutors work with myriad aspects of all students’ literacy development. Their and other tutors’ reflections remind professors and students, alike, that it takes time (and more than one writing center session) to develop those literacy skills necessary to students’ success as writers, readers, and speakers. Tutors’ comments also heighten awareness of the need for more realistic and fair expectations, explicitly stated, for all students.

Form and style. Across all interview groups, tutors described institutional demands for form and style. Among the basic requirements for form that tutors mentioned were expectations for how a paper should be organized; rules about presentation, final appearance, and length; and format guidelines for citations. Tutors acknowledged that these expectations stemmed from the abstract, such as what Glenna referred to as “myths from other students about what a good paper should or should not look like [perpetuated] by peer pressure” or to “syllabi that are way too detailed...that say, ‘This paragraph should look like this, and this paragraph should look like this.’” From the tutors’ descriptions, it appears that many of the demands for form stem from genre expectations. Across all genres, however, was what Zia called the expectation that students had to “...conform...to a certain tone of academic discourse in their writing...that voice within the context of this academic prose, this academic structure.” Demands for form and style resulted in students’ attempts to

write toward what was expected of them—or at least toward what they believe was expected of them. As many tutors indicated, students’ attempts to meet the demands for a particular genre or style often led them to approximate those demands in ways that did not always lead to effective writing. Like demands for perfect grammar, demands for both form and style often stood in the way of tutors’ attempts to focus students’ attention onto higher order concerns in the paper.

The tutors attributed many of the demands for form and style to academic genres that have become institutionalized as standard assignments over time. Those include dissertations and masters theses required of graduate students and a number of standard genres assigned to undergraduate students: senior theses or capstone projects, lab reports, case studies, personal statements, autobiographies, narratives, research papers, position papers, rhetorical/literary analyses, and a variety of essays (argument, classification and division, comparison/contrast). None of the tutors mentioned working with students on creative writing projects.

Tutors described how academic genres had similar effects on both graduate and undergraduate students’ work, agency, and identities. For example, Nyla, a tutor from Northlake University, described the pressures dissertations have on graduate students:

[Dissertating writers] are very clearly working on something within an institutional demand. They have a committee that’s going to give them a medal, a Ph.D. medal. So the institutional demand is to create this document that meets their committee members’ needs and their ideas of what the larger academic community wants, and it’s very high stakes for them, more than a

grade. And they more often really believe in what they're writing and care about perhaps more than [a student] writing a bullshit paper for a...class, [a paper] which that student likes but one in which it's okay if they make an argument they believe or not.

Nyla went on to note how dissertating writers must often meet demands set by their committees, their institutions, and academe in general—demands that the writer might not “buy into” but are willing to “deploy.” Nyla attributed the writer's compliance to their institutional status. She believed that the writer's institutional status prevents them from falling “victim” to the demands for required, expected language or form because they have already decided to comply. She added that the writer is especially motivated to meet demands because the dissertation carries “high-stakes,” career-making or career-breaking consequences. In addition to their choices, dissertators' prior experience as writers and members of academic and disciplinary discourse communities means they struggle less to meet institutional demands related to content, discourse, form, and style. Thus, while graduate students experience the effects of standard demands for writing, their experiences differ from those of undergraduate students.

Experience, then, explains the difference between reactions to standard demands for form and discourse among undergraduate and graduate students. Zia, a graduate student tutor at Southcentral University observed the difference.

There is a definite implication of a certain prose expected that has a certain tone, a certain style, that's aimed at a certain audience, and I think this is something we learn through our training. We learn it's kind of an

enculturation....We're really almost enculturating students to this new academic community and helping them learn this voice, appropriate this voice, and put on something that really isn't theirs.

This is particularly true for freshmen. She goes on to say that "by the time that we get to the grad student level, we're so used to [the enculturation process] that the way we relate to it as a grad student, we can totally bypass that and skip straight to the academic discourse."

Other tutors relayed the effects of standardized assignments, form, and style on undergraduate students than graduate students. Cherise, a tutor from Northeastern University, noted the effect of standard genres on undergraduate students' first-year writing experiences:

There are standard assignments used for the introductory composition classes. So these assignments...are some things that students come in with...that they're forced to fit themselves into, which at times works, and other times, I think not because it can be sort of stifling for the student.

Cherise later attributed these assignments to general curricular aims of universities, particularly those for "entry level composition courses."

Josefena, a tutor from Heartland College, noted how fitting into a mold and meeting such specific expectations could potentially make students start to hate the process of writing, and over time, that hatred becomes institutionalized: "*Writing is a chore* is the institutional way of seeing it," she emphasized. She went on to describe how students come to loathe writing as a process, a conclusion she drew from the post-session reflections from students:

I was surprised how often they mentioned that they forgot that they don't really love writing anymore. That they just do these things and just go through this process and sort of start to loathe [writing] because...everything's very specific. There are instructions from your professor. You have to fit this mold. It's very like, almost like a stressful process, because you're writing for someone, and you don't know what they want necessarily, but you know they want something, and it's just hard to meet those demands. I think that puts a lot of pressure on the students, and they start to lose that passion and love for writing.

In the next several sections, I will describe the demands that most often proved challenging to undergraduate students.

The five paragraph essay. Of particular note among these expectations were the number of references to the five paragraph essay. Tutors who referred to the five paragraph essay described both explicit and implicit demands for the form. For example, in describing expectations for the five paragraph essay, Mira said, "For some teachers I know, the student must have their thesis in the first paragraph, which is their introduction. And they usually aren't allowed to have a two paragraph introduction, just one paragraph." Rena, a tutor at Midwestern University, where freshmen are also assigned five paragraph essays, referred to students having "a very strict set of rules to conform to. There's not a lot of room for creativity. A lot of students feel they are pressured into this box." She attributed the constraints to an institutionalized mentality that implied, "'This is how you must write' instead of 'Writing can be fun.'"

Dependence on the five paragraph form, which tutors attribute to high school instruction, limited students' ability to move beyond the form when required. In their narratives, tutors described learning the five paragraph essay, so they knew why students grew to depend on the form. But that dependence spelled trouble for some writers. Rayna, a tutor from Southeastern University, described her work with students who found it hard to move to other genres.

They're stuck in the pattern of five paragraph essays, and when you ask them to do something else, they don't know how to come out of that five paragraph box. They think they write the intro, the body, the conclusion and [they're] done.

Again, experience made a difference in how quickly tutors could liberate students from their dependence on the five paragraph form. The more opportunities students had to write in other forms, the more successful they would be in writing the various, other assignments expected of college writers.

Academic discourse and style.

Students' attempts to approximate an academic discourse proved particularly challenging for students whose prior instruction left them dependent on others' feedback and, consequently, unable to be what Una described as "perpetually self-critical." Though tutors observed these characteristics among undergraduate and graduate students, most tutors attributed the behaviors to high school instruction. Students who were taught to rely on their teachers' feedback and decisions about the development of their papers often failed to develop as their own first critical readers. They were unable to take on the identity of the academic writer, and so had little to no

agency in their own writing. Ethlyn, a tutor from Northeastern University, observed the influence of the student's high school "strict" writing instruction on a student's decisions to accept—uncritically—institutional demands for writing.

The ones I see come in a lot are the ones who come from a really strict regimen in high school and get really overwhelmed with it. I tutored this [student] who had [an assignment], and you have to put yourself into it, and because his high school [teacher] told him you can never put yourself in a paper, he had a difficult time.... We went over it, and he came back, and he still couldn't put himself in the paper. He just couldn't do it.

This example warrants another look. When students are told not to use "I" in an academic paper, they learn that their voice is secondary to an objective, authorial third person. Not only does that third person identity permeate the paper, it overtakes the writing process. When students lose the ability to see themselves anywhere in their own writing, they become suspect of their own voices and experiences, believing both unworthy. Aside from the grade they will eventually "own," they dissociate from the writing, the process, and the decisions. Thus, Ethlyn was right when she later wondered whether the student's prior experience changed his thought processes. He could not put himself in a paper that required him to use first person because his "self" has become too far removed from the critical role it needs to play in his writing.

JJ, a tutor from Midwestern University, observed the influence of high school instruction on freshmen, as well. He noted how most freshmen come from high school having followed strict rules. Without them, students appeared lost and did not

know how to proceed. JJ described working with students who found it hard to deviate from models and used the personal narratives as an example: “And [students] are like ‘What? I don’t know what that means. How many sentences should be in that?’” JJ’s colleague described similar reactions by students who hold tight to the form at the expense of the personal. Rena described working with “a lot of students who feel they have to write a certain way, conform to this academic style, but they take themselves out of that completely.” She found that what resulted was a “very stiff sounding essay [that conforms] to the traditional academic style.” She described conversations she had with students who made this attempt and offered this generalization: “When I talk to the students, often it’s because they feel like it’s not quite enough that they just write it themselves, they sort of have to become this other person...in order to write in the academic style.” Her approach was to talk them through the assignment, take notes for them, and help them to include more of themselves in the paper while also meeting the demand for the academic discourse style.

Experience and prior instruction played important roles in first-year students’ transition into the academic discourse and styles of college writing. But experience and prior writing instruction also made a difference in graduate students’ success. Tutors described the challenges that graduate students face when meeting academic discourse or style expectations, especially on research papers. According to the tutors, graduate students most often sought help on research writing that needed to be technically and stylistically accurate. Terminology was also challenging for students who were new to the discourse of their fields of study. Finally, the attention paid to

writing as a skill set in the graduate student's field of study made a difference in their being able to write when required. This finding was born out by Nora's work with Conservatory students.

Nora's experience with the Conservatory students counters other tutors' observations about institutional demands' effects on graduate students in other fields of study. The tutors' different experiences indicate that, in the majority of cases, graduate students willingly come to their scholarly work having already been acculturated in how to meet the expectations of the genres for their particular fields and because they have decided to meet or adapt to demands set before them. Students' experience and investment, then, both increase the likelihood that they will have more confidence in their abilities and decisions as a writer, a confidence that develops over time if the teaching and learning circumstances nurture it. For those students, the favorable acceptance of their work by advisors, committees, and professors is still important, but as tutors' descriptions of sessions with graduate students revealed, the session focuses more on the graduate student's development as an aspiring scholar in their field rather than on the rudimentary elements of writing, which are more often the focus of less experienced student writers.

Tutors could relate to how students felt. Of 30 who reported on their own experiences learning to write, each felt that their prior experiences affected their tutoring practices. Twenty tutors described both positive and negative aspects of their high school writing instruction and how that instruction affected their tutoring and college writing experiences. Among the negative aspects was the focus on grammar instruction and the mastery of the five paragraph essay. Three tutors also reported

how their Advanced Placement (AP) coursework actually worked against them as college writers; they felt that there was too much focus on writing for literary analysis, which prevented them from learning to write in other genres. That these tutors' AP scores were good meant they were not required to take courses during their first two years of college that might have benefited them. At least one said that they never took a college writing class until they were an upper division student. Seven tutors also commented on how curricula afforded them few opportunities to write creatively, and they were creative writers. Another said they were taught in a bilingual classroom in high school. When they worked in the writing center, they used their home language and the techniques learned in high school to help bilingual students.

Topics and authorial stance. Tutors referred to institutional demands that stem from social, political, and religious norms of both the university and the professoriate. The values and viewpoints of the institution and professors complicated both writers' and tutors' work, called into question audience and purpose, and affected topic choice and authorial stance. Tutors identified particular challenges to freshmen writers, who were not only new to campus but new to college writing.

Several tutors offered examples of how topic and authorial stance led to consequences for both students and tutors and, consequently, their conversation. As tutors from several institutions observed, there were some topics and points of view that were simply off limits. Jeremy, a tutor from Middle States University, noted that "especially [for] the freshmen or sophomore composition classes, the topics people choose tend to be almost bland [because they] don't want to stir up trouble with the

professor, so they tend to stick with something safe.” Several tutors described sessions with students who presented arguments that they knew professors would find objectionable. Freshmen were particularly prone to writing papers that made unsubstantiated claims. Unsubstantiated claims, whether an oversight of a writer unfamiliar with the genre or the writer’s personal opinions on a topic, resulted in overtly biased arguments on the basis of one or more of the following: race, sex, gender, class, and language. Una, who tutors and teaches writing at her university, attributed this difficulty to the nature of argument: “I think an argument paper sets you up to...take on this identity that a freshman is really not ready to take.”

Cassandra, Una’s colleague who also teaches and tutors writing, pointed out that argument requires a process that “you can’t separate from knowledge making.” She went on to say that when students come to her having only a set of ideas or an unsubstantiated argument they “spend the session not writing but engaging in this knowledge making, trying to...arrive at a logical enough conclusion....” She later indicated that this negotiation process takes longer than what a single session in the writing center affords because the goal must be “to address the deep structure of writing, which is ultimately a value struggle between the writer and the audience....”

Cassandra’s observation points to the time it takes to help inexperienced writers work through the genre’s rhetorical features, but it also raises questions about the priority given to the professor as audience rather than to the student as writer. As Nyla described, “the ghost of the teacher is always at the writing center table.” This presence sometimes affected the way tutors responded to students’ papers.

When addressing biased or potentially offensive papers, tutors' approaches varied, and their responses were dependent on three factors: the degree to which the student met the rhetorical standards of argument, the degree to which the professor would look favorably upon the student's perspective, and the degree to which the paper offended the tutor's own sensitivities.

The majority of tutors described sessions where they served as "benign readers," according to Zia, who was trained not to change students' minds but to help them answer the assignment while substantiating their claims with evidence. At times, tutors did their best to help the student write the best "offensive" paper possible. JJ described his colleague's approach.

We have a colleague who was very proud of the fact that [they] worked with a writer who'd taken an extremely sexist tone and put forth a sexist argument in an essay. "Alright. Let's do this," [the tutor said], and did everything they could to help the writer build the strongest, well-supported sexist argument...because they thought, and I definitely agree with this, [that] the paper is in the hands of the student. The writer makes the choices, and we're supposed to facilitate those choices to the best of our ability.

Tutors described similar approaches, and the majority agreed that their job was not to change the writer's position. Sherina, from Southcentral University, who noted the diverse student body on her university's campus, said that she does not get emotionally involved with writers' perspectives but instead falls back on her tutor training and the standards for argument:

I'll go back to logic.... I'll say, "Logically, there seems to be a hole here," or "As a reader, I feel like you're making a leap here." And I point it out, and again, if they [agree], I say, "We should develop that." I'll work with them. I'll try to help them make their argument better. Even if it's against what I believe in, that's their belief.

These tutors' comments stand in contrast to those tutors who warned students about writing from a perspective that they knew would offend a professor. Martina, a tutor at Northcentral University, admitted that she considers how professors might respond to students' papers. She went on to say, "The paper could be perfectly worded, perfectly argued, but if it's something they can't agree with or think is repugnant, they'll grade it accordingly." Her approach was not to change the student's position but to recommend they follow up with their professors before turning the paper in. Her colleague Ned agreed that students' papers needed to present a "marketable" argument if professors were going to accept them favorably.

At times, tutors' responses to papers stemmed more from their own identities. Cassandra, a tutor from Southcentral University, described one session with a student who was writing a classical argument essay. During the session, Cassandra relied on her experience as a writing instructor and colleague to the professor who would eventually read the student's work. As she acknowledged, the session "was a rough, rough session. Because there were all these other layers involved. It wasn't simply just about 'Here's my professor's expectations of me.' No. This was a socio-cultural-political-psychological issue." Adding to the complexity of that issue was race and ethnicity: the tutor's and the instructor's. The student's assignment was to write an

argument, but as the tutor observed, the student did not “realize the rhetorical stakes involved” (Cassandra Harper, July 10, 2008). At stake was the student’s grade, which the tutor felt may be compromised on the basis of the student’s position on the topic, a position the tutor did not think her colleague would accept. As a result, she used her other institutional role to help the student write a paper she knew that her colleague expected.

Cassandra’s colleague Zia warned against that type of intervention. Zia’s approach was to act only as a reader whose goal was to help students look “beyond the paper,” to “position [themselves] as the ideal reader and say, ‘Hey, as a reader, this is what I really want to know here. As a reader, this is what I really have a problem with.’” Sherina, another colleague, described a similar approach.

I don’t feel like it’s my job to change the topic necessarily because we may occasionally happen to know the professor but usually we don’t. Usually, that’s not part of our job. Our job is to take it as the assignment and as one person reading it, how we interpret what they’re saying. I feel like it’s my job to make it clear to them how I’m taking that and that someone else *might* take it that way, and then they get to decide if they want it to be taken that way, and if they want to write about that. That is not my decision.

In a follow-up to this comment, Zia said, “I like how you put that because that’s exactly it. You become like their mirror. ‘Okay, here’s what I’m hearing when you say this. Is this what you want? Because this is what I’m hearing.’”

Though tutors might be trained as “readers,” several admitted to how their own ideologies and identities influenced their response to students’ papers. Though I

did not ask tutors to identify their race, language, age, or class backgrounds, eight tutors specifically noted how these and other identity markers affected their response to either institutional demands for writing, students' work, or both. Of the eight were two tutors who self-identified by race and indicated how it affected their work with students. One reported walking away from a session when a student who used the "N-word" would not consider the tutor's suggestion that the word may offend others. Another tutor spoke about how their own experiences with discrimination informed their response to students' papers, especially on papers that may extend racial or ethnic stereotyping, or when the tutor knew the professor's race or ethnicity. One tutor self-identified as an "international student" and English second language user and noted how they used that identity to connect with English Language Learners. Three tutors referred to how their age affected their work with students. One graduate student talked about how their age helped inform their work with non-traditional students. The tutor believed "non-trads" were better poised to answer standard demands for writing given their membership in other institutions over the years. Because the tutor was also a non-traditional student, they understood well the pressures non-traditional students faced when returning to school after a number of years, juggling their coursework with other obligations and re-learning how to write. The tutor's younger, undergraduate colleague, however, noted how their age sometimes led older students to question their capabilities to tutor. One tutor acknowledged how their socioeconomic status as a child benefited their educational opportunities, and their work in the center informed an awareness that not all students come to college having had those opportunities. Another identified their religion and

mentioned how, after reading biased papers, they learned how others might perceive them.

That particular tutor and five other tutors identified as composition instructors on their campuses; all but one said they tried to separate their work as instructors from their work as tutors, though their work still influenced their response to students' papers. As these tutors indicated, at times that was hard to do, especially if the tutor taught the same course, knew the student's professor, or worked with professors to design writing assignments. On this last point, I mentioned earlier how tutors believed writing assignments were either too detailed or too abstract for students to understand. Una, a tutor who also taught on her university's campus, described her experience with poorly constructed assignments and their influence on her work with students:

I think we've all had papers, assignments where you just went, "This assignment SUCKS! There is no way that this professor is going to get the kind of paper that they think they're going to get" because the assignment is written in such a way that you can tell as a writer and as a teacher. I can tell what they WANT, but I know that that criteria is NOT in that assignment. So what's going to come out on the other end is not necessarily going to be the best paper. And I think we have this with composition.

It was Una who earlier asserted that argument essays posed particular challenges for freshmen who have difficulty assuming the identities that some assignments presumed them to have or desire. She described her work with one student who asked

for help constructing an identity for himself in order to answer an assignment about a family life he never had.

“I wasn’t raised by my parents to begin with. They are no longer alive.” He said all of this before we even talked about the paper. Before we even looked at it. And he said, “So I need help making this up.” Well, to me, that presents a number of issues, right?

Una described how she encouraged the student to go back to the instructor, whom she knew, and ask for another assignment. She told him exactly what to say: “Here’s my situation. I don’t have parents. I don’t have a family that meets your definition of family, and I need an alternative assignment.” She also told him to let the professor know that she recommended he request the new assignment. But the student refused to do this, and Una refused to help him make up experiences. “I can’t do that,” she told him. “I can’t be party to that. And I’m sorry.” According to Una, the student remained adamant, saying, ““But you have to.””

As these tutors’ stories indicate, their attempts to help writers approximate the academic style or discourse professors expect is complicated, messy work (Kail, 1983). To do so sometimes means tutors help writers meet lower order demands when the focus should really be on writing process and how to address higher order, global concerns. At times, it means encouraging students to play it safe by presenting a view on topics that mirrors or complements the values and views of the university or a professor. At other times, it means the tutor lays aside their own ideologies and identities to help the writer write the best paper they can, while at other times, it means challenging or walking away from a writer who has written something that

offends them personally or might offend others. In the next section, I extend the discussion of tutors' identities by pointing to another outcome of institutionalized writing instruction and assessment, namely, how the disjunction between tutors' and others' perceptions of their role not only affects tutors' work but also implicates them and the writing center in the standardization of students' writing.

Institutional demands and tutors' work, agency, and identities. My first research question asks, To what extent do the institutional demands of standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writing center tutors' practice and identities? Related to that question was the degree of agency tutors felt they have in helping writers improve, the relationship between that agency and tutors' identities, and the circumstances under which tutors appropriate, adapt, or resist the social structure created by institutionalized writing instruction and assessment.

Tutors' dual institutional status as tutor and student means tutors can speak to the effects of institutional demands for writing in ways that faculty and scholars cannot. But that status also complicates tutors' work. When I asked tutors to choose among five priorities for what they were most interested in accomplishing when working with writers, all but three of the 51 tutors who responded indicated that fulfilling the writer's needs and goals for their own writing was their first priority. Those three tutors chose that as their second priority behind fulfilling the assignment's or professor's expectations for writing. Interestingly, none of the tutors ranked "fulfilling other expectations of what good writing is" above a 4, and most ranked that priority last. Tutors were asked to identify those "other expectations," and it was no surprise that they listed many of the demands they identified in the

interviews. These findings reinforced tutors' comments from the interviews and narratives when they described their quest to put the writer's needs above the assignment's or professor's expectations and, in general, above institutional demands.

These findings also substantiate what tutors said about having to negotiate between meeting the expectations of the student, of the writing center, and of the institution. Tutors wanted to help writers with their personal goals, but those goals were restricted to meeting the goals of the assignment, the professor, or other institutional standards. In addition, both tutors' and students' place within the institutional hierarchy makes it difficult for either to avoid meeting others' goals. As Corina acknowledged, "We're neither teacher nor student, but we're more student. Meeting the teacher's expectations would still fall under the same category of meeting institutional expectations as opposed to meeting students' expectations." While that may be true, most tutors indicated their attempts to separate themselves and their work from institutional expectations. When that separation failed to materialize, tutors reported feeling a range of emotions: disappointment, failure, frustration, and even anger. From the tutors' comments, it is clear that those factors included but may not be limited to the following:

- Generally, students want to earn good grades and graduate, which makes them more willing to conform to the demands imposed upon them, thwarting the tutors' chances to steer the student toward a discussion of what might lead to their improvement as writers: process and higher order concerns.

- Professors' and students' expectations that writing center tutors "fix" students' writing means that tutors must spend too much time educating the student of the tutor's role. That writing centers are still seen as "fix it" shops also helps to perpetuate students' "passivity."
- Writing centers are institutions, too, whose practice and assessment may help perpetuate standardization. Commercialization of writing centers and data-driven assessment seem to suggest that writing centers are part of the systemic push to retain students. Retention, tutors surmised, related to standards.
- Not all tutors' sentiments run in opposition to their institution's values for mastery of the demands tutors mentioned. Tutors are students who know the risks of not conforming to standards.

In the following sections, I explain these factors and how they relate to institutional demands for writing and their effects on tutors' work and agency during writing center sessions.

Students' priorities. Tutors' comments yielded several pages of information for institutional and local demands for writing but very little information on writers' personal goals for writing. With one exception, students did not ask for help with a personal goal for writing that did not answer an assignment, a professor's expectations, or a specific genre's requirements. The only exception was Paul, the graduate student at Midwestern University, whose desire to improve proficiency in listening, reading, and writing Standard English led him to the writing center several times a week for over three years. This finding reinforces what tutors described as the

difficulties they sometimes face when attempting to help students see themselves as writers. Stated simply, students' personal goals for their writing were to meet the demands of an assignment, a professor, a credentialing department or committee, or the institution.

Underlying tutors' difficulties in helping refocus students' attention toward writing process and higher order concerns were the consequences for not meeting the demands of an assignment, a professor, or a graduation requirement. According to the tutors, those consequences ranged from poor grades to despoiled reputations, and among the students most vulnerable to those consequences were those with the least amount of experience with academic writing, academic English, and Standard English: first-year students, English Language Learners, and non-traditional students. Danae, a tutor at Northeastern University who worked with students from diverse backgrounds, explained how the consequences affected students and tutors.

When you come into a university or any kind of institution, there are expectations...and if you don't meet those expectations, there are consequences, whether they come in grades or public retaliation.... So tutors need to come to this sort of negotiation where they are producing something up to par with the university without compromising the writer's own creativity and individuality.

The threat of poor grades and public retaliation led students to the writing center where they expressed confusion, anxiety, humiliation, and fear. Tutors felt the pressures tied to that retaliation, as well. Earlier, I described tutors who felt they were under immense pressure to catch all of a student's grammar errors in assignments that

would receive failing or poor grades if there were more than three to five errors. Tutors reported how students and professors, alike, blamed tutors for a student's grade or accused them of not doing their jobs. In contrast, tutors also reported students' attributing their success to the tutor. Both extremes point to how excessive attention to grades diminishes students' agency in their own learning and ownership of their own success as writers.

Students who do not meet institutional demands for writing risk their grades, credentials, and acceptance by other members of discourse communities to which students belong or want to belong. To avoid that risk, some students come to the writing center, expecting tutors to do whatever it takes to help them get the grade or acceptance they need. Una's experience shows that students will even ask a tutor to help them make up experiences they have never had in order to answer an assignment. That request points to another way in which students' desires to avoid risk leads to an unhealthy dependence on tutors. When Una refused to help the student make up their experience, the student's response was, "“But you have to.”" This exchange further illustrates the relationship between authority and agency. Tutors often acknowledged this relationship and its effects on students' requests of tutors. Within the system of school is a hierarchy that tutors described. Students come to college having been socialized to see themselves at the bottom of that hierarchy. Above them is the immediate authority figure: the professor who will judge a student's work and upon whose judgment, the student will either progress at a pace expected of them or not. Above the professor, tutors believed, was the institution, and above the institution were sources of power from which institutionalized demands for

writing instruction and assessment trickle down to universities, through departments, and to professors until finally reaching the student. It is no surprise, then, that the students most vulnerable to those demands are those whose experiences lie farthest from their source: those students who come from language, class, racial, and cultural minorities.

This is the social system in which tutors and students find themselves trying to negotiate during writing center sessions, where the subject may appear to be writing but is much more than that. From one or more of these groups came the student who asked Una to help them make up an experience they never had in order to answer an assignment. As Una astutely observed, the student's dilemma was exacerbated by their feelings of helplessness against the authority inherent in the assignment and, to some degree, their own life's circumstances. That many tutors reported this same helplessness among students who sought their help reinforces what they said about the student's place within the institution and the system of schooling. Students are acculturated early on not to question authority, especially when doing so might lead to devastating circumstances. For a student, grades and acceptance are chief among those circumstances.

Tutors remarks across all data sources point to the effects of the social system of schooling, tied directly to institutionalized demands for writing and assessment, on students' work. Whether they spoke of their own experiences as tutors or other students' experiences, tutors observed that students are socialized to place ownership of their success in others' hands. This thwarts tutors' attempts to turn students' attention toward strategies and behaviors that might help them improve as writers.

Believing they have no or little authority over their own thinking and writing, students succumb to what one tutor described as passivity, a conformity to demands that they attempt to meet, even if doing so means becoming someone else. Tutors have been trained to steer students' focus away from grades and other outside consequences and back inward, toward writing process and writerly acts of mind. But, given the tutors' descriptions of sessions, it is clear that the majority of those attempts fail. Students must ultimately turn in their work for a grade or other form of assessment that has the potential for an immediate payoff or long-term penalty. Only with time will students come to know how process and strategies help them as writers. Only with time will students grow to be more confident in their writing skills. But the number of students who experience these shifts remains dependent on the system. Unless several aspects of the institution change, it is likely that standard demands for writing instruction and assessment will continue to affect tutors and students in ways that the tutors have identified.

Misperceptions of what tutors and writing centers do. In every group, tutors noted how students and professors misunderstood their roles. The writing center field has waged nearly a century long battle against the perception that the writing center's role is to "fix" students' problems, and tutors continue to bare the brunt of this misperception. The dilemma has roots within the same hierarchy that places institutional demands near the top of the hierarchy of schooling and students near the bottom, classrooms at the center of curriculum and instruction and writing centers below them. Professors and students, alike, have become more dependent on writing centers. Tutors pointed to this dependence when they described papers on which the

professor wrote very little but a poor grade with a command to the student to go to the writing center. The message this sends to students is this: *If you want a better grade, you better go to the writing center.* The same message comes when professors tell tutors to “just fix” ELLs’ writing. Thus, both professors and students have become more dependent on the writing center to fix broken writing but less aware of their potential to help writers become better writers. According to the tutors, that mentality perpetuates students’ passive conformity to institutional demands for writing.

Writing centers are institutions, too. Within each round of interviews were tutors from different institutions who spoke about how writing centers helped to perpetuate institutional demands for writing. Pointing to the forms students must fill out after writing center sessions, one group noted how writing center assessment reflected support of institutional demands for writing held by society and their institution. By listing the demands students sought help with on the form, the writing center implicated itself and its tutors in the delivery of those demands. Another tutor pointed to writing centers’ names as indicative of the increasing influence that corporations have played in higher education. Indeed, the corporatization of both curricula and instruction has been well documented by scholars within and outside of the writing center field (Connors, 1986; Giroux, 1993; Downing, Hurlbert, & Mathieu, 2002; Ohmann, 2003). But it appears that tutors have begun to notice the existence of sponsorship within the field, as well. Tutors wondered whether that sponsorship came with funding stipulations tied to the university’s retention goals. Student retention was mentioned in two groups. Tutors described a sense that their writing center seemed to have taken (or been given) more responsibility for student

retention. One tutor, in particular, noted how the writing center's relationship with other campus services led the tutor to believe that part of a tutor's role was to keep students in school.

Tutors' ideas about institutional demands and student success. Though the majority of tutors indicated frustration or similar feelings with the influence of institutionalized demands for writing on students' agency in their own learning, not all tutors felt that there was or needed to be a dichotomy between the demands and students' personal goals for writing. Silvana, a tutor from Heartland College, explained the relationship this way.

One thing that I think has happened is that institutional demands along with the phrase academic writing have become synonymous with this sort of right and wrong in writing. And I think a lot of us and a lot of the people we work with assume that there's not a whole lot of freedom in what they can and cannot do with their own texts as they're creating them because there's this prescribed format and guidelines, restrictions that they're working within to create something of their own. And one thing we've discussed in our writing center is that we as writers are adding to conversations that have already happened. We may add something new, but a lot of the information that we're searching, that we're utilizing is already out there. The discourse is not new. So, for the second part of that then, navigating [between institutional demands and personal goals], it's what are we adding to these texts that already exist, to these ideas that have already been discussed years and years and years before we even entered this scene.... One example that I've used with a lot of the

students I work with is, if you raise your hand in class to add something, you're not just raising your hand to say, "I agree" and stopping or, "I disagree" and stopping. You're saying, "I agree for these reasons. I disagree. You left this and this and this out. These points were not clear." In that sense, institutional demands are demands that...in some ways are restrictions, and in other ways [are] formulas for adding new information.

Silvana's colleague Rileigh followed with a reference to Lunsford's (1991) concept of the writing center as "Burkean Parlor," where students and tutors co-construct knowledge through collaborative learning. Rileigh noted how students need to come to learn that their role is not to simply summarize information that is already out there but to add to it. Silvana added that it is at those points where tutors and students have an opportunity to learn from each other in ways that prevent passive conformity.

That's where we [tutors and students] are jockeying for voice. That's where the individual's perspectives, past, background, everything comes into play. And that's what we're navigating...what we [tutors] as writers or the students we work with as writers are adding to this conversation versus what's already there, what's prescribed, what's accepted or not accepted.

Implications

This empirical study is the first to treat writing centers as research sites where the vernacular architecture of composition instruction informs and becomes informed by students' conversations about writing. Findings demonstrate the effects of standard demands for writing and assessment—those long-held cultural norms for writing—on tutors' and writers' work, agency in their own learning, and identities. It holds that

those norms affect writers in ways that only students can know. It presents tutors and students as both inhabitants and architects of writing centers where, through their collaborative work, both attempt to co-construct new knowledge for themselves, new designs for teaching and learning. It argues that those designs make their way back to the classrooms, where they have the potential to influence writing communities, instruction, and assessment.

I chose to focus on what tutors might add to scholars' conversations about the effects of standardized writing instruction and assessment on students because, as I discuss in Chapter One, tutors come to the writing center session with considerable experience as students and writers. Tutors demonstrate that students know well the implicit and explicit standard demands for writing. They know the language used to teach and to enforce conformity to those demands. They know the public and private consequences for meeting and not meeting those demands. They make decisions about the degree to which they will conform to those demands, adapt them, or resist them altogether.

Furthermore, tutors' institutional role means the institution, as well as the students who seek the tutor's help, confer upon them a level of authority and an expectation that tutors will help students achieve the demands imposed upon them. In this way, tutors are, as Trimbur (1987) asserted, implicated in the system that imposes standardized demands on students. This authority actually presents an opportunity for the composition and writing center fields to learn more about how standard demands for writing affect students. Student writers bring questions to writing center tutors that relate directly to the demands they are expected to meet.

The inherent contradictions that lie at the intersections between what the institution expects tutors and students to do and what both have been trained and socialized to do affects their decisions during the writing center session. As tutors' reflections show, the conversation between tutor and student are snapshots of students' "struggle to articulate" (Knoblauch, 1988, p. 125) the complex relationship with institutional demands for writing. When Cassandra described her attempt to help a student avoid certain retribution for writing a paper that not only failed to capture the rhetorical nuances of the genre but presented racist ideologies, she showed that tutoring is not simply a matter of helping a student meet expectations for an assignment. Cassandra's references to the interplay between rhetorical expectations, professors' ideologies, and individuals' identities—in that session, it was race—point to how tutors' and students' conversations become these "burden-y things," where institutional demands and ideologies from somewhere up on the hierarchical ladder act upon students' experiences, identities, and educational aspirations.

This study offered tutors a chance to situate themselves and other students within those hierarchies and to tell their stories. Their reflections and my findings now serve as "both a narrative for agency as well as a referent for critique" (Giroux, 1987, p. 10) of the effects of institutional demands for writing instruction and assessment under which teachers and students work. Throughout this chapter, tutors' descriptions of sessions describe the effects of institutional demands for writing on students in ways that only students can know. Tutors' responses point to a pedagogical expertise far more sophisticated than previously considered in the composition, writing center, and education fields. As each snapshot offered by the

tutors reveals, both tutor and student rely on a host of tools, experiences, and strategies—not all effective—to co-construct new skills and identities as writers. Tutors’ reflections show how students enact different identities as they struggle to develop new identities for themselves against institutional forces that may prevent them from succeeding. There are many ways educators and researchers in the composition and writing center fields can use what tutors have taught me.

Implications for the Composition Field

This study is the first to emerge from the writing center field that relies on students’ insights into how standardized writing instruction and assessment affect writers’ work, agency in their own learning, and identities. Given its focus and reliance on tutors’ narrative reflections about the nature and effects of those demands, this study illustrates the need for students to be recognized as a worthy “knowledge community” (Bruffee, 1984a, 1995) whose discursive practices reflect the effects of institutional demands for writing instruction and assessment on teaching and learning. Findings will interest those in the composition field who teach writing or study writing, writing instruction, and writing assessment. Because of its focus on institutional demands for writing, including standards that emerge from local and national policies, this study’s findings can inform responses to K-College policies for standards in English Language Arts. Tutors’ insights reinforce statements made about the effects of standardization, in general, and standardized writing curricula and assessment in particular, especially on student populations most vulnerable to those effects: first-year writers and members of linguistic, racial, cultural, and class minority groups (Huot, 2002; Huot, 2007; Matsuda, 2006). Descriptions of writing

center sessions show how students react to the demands and attempt to meet them in ways that do not always lead to effective writing. Worse, as tutors described, are the ways in which the consequences for not meeting those standards lead the majority of writers, but especially those most vulnerable, to become passive conformists to demands that require them to be *someone else*. The writer who chose to make up a life rather than ask the professor for a new assignment is a perfect example of the lengths some students will go to conform to expectations. Less extreme examples include those where tutors reported students who attempted to write in voices that do not sound like theirs. Though aware of how their work fails to fit the standards, the point is that students attempt to meet them anyway in order to avoid negative consequences. As the tutors observed, these attempts come at a considerable price to student's agency, self-confidence, and self-advocacy.

This study's findings, particularly tutors' perceptions of the influence of high school instruction on college writers, should bolster the efforts of educators and scholars from across institutional levels who are currently working to address newly proposed K-12 English Language Arts standards. In March, 2010, the National Governors Association (NGA) and other groups proposed the K-12 Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS). Leaders of the Common Core States Standards Initiative (2010) and the Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) announced the launch of those standards on June 2, 2010 in Georgia. Forty-seven other states, the District of Columbia, and two territories are expected to follow suit. In order for states to receive federal stimulus funds, they must demonstrate alignment with the standards (Williams, 2010). Because those standards have implications for

writing curriculum, instruction, and assessment for K-College institutions, leaders from NCTE, the National Writing Project (NWP), and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) have joined to issue a response. That response began in the summer of 2009 with a framework distributed to elicit feedback on the CCSS from K-College English teachers, writing center directors, and writing assessment experts. O'Neil, Eodice, Adler-Kassner, and Janangelo (2009) offered a revised list of standards based on current research that accounted for the known “challenges that students face once they arrive in college, challenges that [the authors did] not find to be sufficiently addressed in the Common Core State Standards” (para. 2). Findings from my study limn those known challenges, which are revealed through students’ experiences with other students. The tutors’ reflections also serve to strengthen other key points made by the authors.

Noting how the CCSS failed to address the prior experiences of first-year writers, the authors of the revised standards issued a “call for attention to the range of writing activities that would best contribute to the development of student writers as they enter college and also *throughout* their college careers” (para. 2). Tutors’ discussion of writing instruction in secondary school, in particular, and the ways in which that instruction affects students once they get to college is especially germane to this point. The authors call for a host of writing experiences designed to help students “to gain knowledge, express ideas, and communicate both in academic and workplace contexts” (para. 2). They later introduce revised standards, which “emphasize the inherently contextual nature of writing and the recursive, iterative

practice necessary for writing development” (para.4). Tutors’ descriptions of writing center sessions depict their attempts to help students develop these views of writing and writing process, but those attempts were often thwarted by narrow, prescribed expectations for writing imposed upon students.

Implications for Writing Teachers

With its presentation of students’ perspectives, this study forges new ground in the critiques of standardized curricular and instructional demands imposed upon teachers and students. Now, those classroom educators who decry the effects of institutional demands on teaching and learning can open dialogue with their students about how institutional demands for writing affect their composing processes.

Though tutors often criticized professors’ pedagogies and assessment practices, they also acknowledged that many professors fall victim to standards set for them by those outside the classroom. The tutors’ awareness points to the potential for faculty to work with students in ways that might lead to systemic change within and across classrooms and campuses. Tutors’ assessments of how certain standards lead to high-stakes wins or losses for students point to the pressures students face. That tutors described students who come to the center in despair, in tears, or in fear reinforces Smyth’s (2008) findings that point to a host of emotional and physical effects of high-stakes testing on K-12 students; my study reinforces Smyth’s and others’ findings by showing how high-stakes demands for college writers affect their agency and identities. Professors, writing program administrators, and writing center directors can work collaboratively to identify the effects of writing instruction and assessment on

student groups tutors identified as those most vulnerable to the negative consequences institutional demands. Doing so may lead to better designs for writing instruction and assessment for those students.

Thus, tutors' descriptions of how standards affect writers will inform K-12 and post-secondary classroom instruction and assessment. Williams (2010) asserts that "no standards document in and of itself will change instruction or student learning; teachers will" (para. 7). I have faith in William's assertion. But as some educators know, I also believe students and teachers working together can achieve even more. Bruffee (1994), Lunsford (1991/2008), Kail (1983), and now Dean (2010) whose study focuses on a high school writing center, have all pointed to the potential for writing center tutors—students—to change teaching and learning in classrooms. This is no more true for two- and four-year colleges and universities than it is for K-12 schools.

While some educators may question what students could possibly add to classroom discussions of standards and practice, these tutors' reflections on their work as tutors and as students should encourage teachers to engage students in those discussions. Writing center directors can facilitate these efforts with the help of writing center tutors. Writing center peer tutors are students. Over the course of their school careers, tutors, like their peers, have become acculturated in the language of school and standards. Tutors in this study spoke about how they recognize those standards in writing assignments, writing instruction, and writing assessment. They spoke to the effects of standards on students' work, agency, and identities. They

offered strategies for helping writers meet or adapt those standards for their own writing. But they also helped writers see that they had options from which they could choose. Furthermore, the many strategies that tutors employ with writers from diverse academic, writing, and personal backgrounds might be of interest to instructors looking for new approaches to teaching writing, especially to first-year writers, English Language Learners, and non-traditional students.

Implications for the Writing Center Field

This is the first empirical study that relies on writing center tutors' narrative reflections to explore the effects of institutional demands for writing and assessment on students' work, agency, and identities. As I show in Chapter Two, this study is the first to use narrative research to join the composition and writing center fields in a way that relies only on the perspectives of writing center tutors. When I began collecting tutors' reflections in the fall of 2007, I found only one book-length discussion of the potential for using narrative research in writing center studies (Briggs & Woolbright, 2000). As I noted, only one contributor to that book was, at the time, a writing center tutor (Jukuri, 2000). Few other writing center scholars (or scholars whose work has influenced writing center pedagogy) have since pointed to the use of narratives to explore or to resolve concerns of the writing center field (Bishop, 1997; Brandt, 2001; Spigelman, 2001; Welch, 2002; Grimm, 2008). Furthermore, only recently, have two additional book-length texts emerged in the writing center field that take up the issue of identity in writing center work (Denny, 2010; Dean, 2010). Dean's (2010) dissertation, which includes the perspectives of

high school writing center tutors, also looks at the potential for writing center tutors to create change in classroom instruction. My study extends Denny's and Dean's identity work by presenting tutors' narrative reflections on concerns that affect them and other students. What tutors present about identity and institutional demands is relevant to both the K- College composition and writing center fields. In that way, this study positions writing centers as viable research sites through which the composition field may learn more about writing and writing instruction, and it proves that writing center tutors—students—make credible research partners. Composition programs and writing centers simply need to make better use of tutors' expertise.

This study is also the first in the two fields to rely on tutors' reflections to demonstrate students' keen awareness of the myriad forms of standard demands for writing and ways in which those demands affect them. The writing center field can take these findings and raise awareness of how instruction and assessment affect students' composing processes in ways that thwart their success. Tutors' specific references to how standards and professors' feedback affect certain student populations (first-year students and ELLs, for example) point to areas of opportunity for the writing center field to work to educate faculty on best practices tied to students' diverse learning experiences in the United States and abroad. A perfect example of this is when Larsen applied his knowledge of the Chinese language to help a student learn how to use verb tenses. Again, Larsen's and other tutors' strategies suggest that more can be made of tutors' expertise.

Findings present the writing center field with additional opportunities. One is to work more closely with writing program administrators and faculty to bring instructional and assessment practices in line with students' literacy learning needs, experiences, and styles. Another is to engage students in literacies that will serve them on and off campus. That includes collaborating with area K-12 schools in order to help make the transfer from high school to college writing easier for all students but especially for students who attend schools in urban and rural areas blighted by poverty. That engagement may take the form of helping area schools set up writing centers where tutors can help younger students make the connection between reading and writing, collaborating with teachers on literacy education and events, and mentoring younger students on how to make the transition to college.

This study also presents writing center directors with a challenge to conduct more research on what students and tutors really want out of their college writing instruction. One of the most surprising findings this study revealed was why students' needs to meet standard demands for writing left tutors frustrated and angry. That is, as students, tutors could relate to students' reactions to meeting standard demands; what seemed to frustrate tutors more were their failed attempts to make good on their writing center training. Tutors who attended and tutored at institutions where there was a shared understanding that diversity was good expressed less frustration. Tutors who described campuses where strict conformity to standards was expected expressed more frustration. Though writing centers in those institutions might have trained tutors to be staunch advocates of students' rights to decide the degree to which they

wanted to accept, adapt, or resist standard demands, the fact remained that tutors knew what students had to do in order to be rewarded. When tutors ranked their priorities, all but three claimed that their priority was to students. But second to that priority was tutors' desire to help students meet the expectations of an assignment or a professor. Tutors' desire to fulfill the expectations of their writing center director or their training ranked third or fourth. What these rankings and tutors' reflections suggest is that they are being trained to do what they do not have the institutional authority to do, and that makes them feel guilty, frustrated, and confused about what their role really is. As Roseanne pondered, "Maybe we really are just grammar checkers. I hope not, but...."

Tutors' perspectives point to opportunities for further dialogue among themselves and with their directors on topics that have yet to be examined as obstacles to tutors' efficacy and students' learning. Just like the students who seek their help, tutors sometimes feel helpless to competing demands placed upon them by the institution, the writing center, and students. As several tutors indicated, there need not be a dichotomous relationship between institutional demands and personal goals for writing. That tutors feel pressured to believe that there is leaves them questioning their value to the writing center field and to the students who seek their help. Findings from this study indicate that the field needs to pay closer attention to what it asks of tutors and the realities of what tutors are being asked to do or feel they must do. Doing so may require writing center directors to work with tutors to educate faculty on the benefits of assignments that encourage writers to learn standards while also

seeing themselves as writers who are responsible for the majority of decisions regarding the writing. Writing center directors may also need to address misperceptions of the writing center's and tutors' role that make tutors targets of conjecture (i.e. "Fixing students errors is your job, right?"), adoration ("Thanks for getting me an A on my paper!"), or criticism ("You didn't catch all my [my students'] grammar errors!"). While many of the tutors acknowledged their directors' efforts to head off these misperceptions, perhaps more full-scale, proactive approaches are in order with the focus being on faculty development that involves tutors. Those tutors who serve as writing fellows assigned to work directly with faculty reported less confusion about their role amongst the professors with whom they worked. Tutors also reported working more closely with professors on designing writing assignments and assessments. Tutors have a lot to offer faculty, but the first hurdle may be cutting through the misunderstanding of what they do.

One way to make the role of tutors more transparent across the composition and writing center fields is to push their knowledge of what affects students' literacy lives out to where others can learn from it. A few of the writing center field's tutor training manuals feature the perspectives of peer tutors (Rafoth, 2005; Bruce & Rafoth, 2009), and each year, tutors publish articles in the field's two publications, *The Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. But the majority of tutors' experiences are shared within centers themselves, among colleagues, or presented at writing center conferences. Tutors' and students' voices need to be heard across campuses in classrooms, department meetings, and faculty's and

administrators' offices. They need to be heard across conferences attended by K-College educators, writing center directors, and writing program administrators. They also need to be heard by lawmakers and policymakers and those who design curriculum and assessment texts for use in both secondary and post-secondary classrooms. Tutors' perceptions about how institutional demands for writing affect teaching and learning will extend the knowledge in the composition and writing center fields about how curriculum, instruction, and assessment in secondary and post-secondary classrooms need to change. Those changes are necessary in order for students to get the help they need to become successful writers.

Conclusion

This study's findings rest on writing center tutors' observations of specific ways in which cultural norms for writing affect students' work, agency, and identities. I argue that students' voices have been missing for far too long from conversations about writing instruction and assessment held by those in the composition, writing center, and education fields. What students have to say of their experiences learning to write is critical to any discussion—local or national—about best practices in classrooms and writing centers. As tutors in this study demonstrated, students are socialized from an early age to see themselves as both subjects and objects of the institutional demands of society, the academy, and individual instructors. They do not often come to see themselves as decision makers with responsibility or ownership over their own ideas or writing. The cultural norms for writing instruction and assessment mark students' work, agency, and identities in ways that only students can fully know and disclose. Tutors in this study pointed to

the many ways that those norms impact teaching and learning. Tutors show how those norms drive students' motivations as writers and lead to ineffective composing strategies.

One critical finding from this study comes from tutors' observations about the impact of institutional demands for writing on students' agency in their own learning. I call attention to this because of my own experience teaching writing in secondary and post-secondary classrooms and writing centers with colleagues who express frustration with students who struggle to articulate what they think, connect ideas in a way that makes sense, and support those ideas with examples from various sources, including their own experiences. As tutors in this study reinforced, writing instruction and assessment have become barriers to the very acts of mind that professors expect of students and that many of the professors I know try to nurture. As several tutors in the study noted, institutional demands for writing can thwart a student's ability to think for themselves or lead them to believe that doing so is inappropriate or might get them into trouble. Other tutors observed how the constant reminder of the consequences for meeting or not meeting institutional demands leads students most vulnerable to them to take steps to become someone they are not. A perfect example of this is Una's student who asked her to help them make up an experience they never had before in order to answer a professor's assignment.

Tutors in this study show us that agency in their own learning is paramount to students' long-term growth and success as writers. Without agency, students do not learn that their ideas, their writing, and their success as writers relate to each other and belong to them. Their skills in critical thinking, reading, writing, and speaking

become truncated. They do not feel valued as thinkers or writers. They adopt a view that writing is simply a product to be judged by a professor. They do not learn that writing is communication, and that audiences vary, depending on the rhetorical act. They do not learn that writing is a process, and the best process is one that they develop for themselves. They do not learn the strategies or “habits of mind” that successful writers use nor how to practice them (Adler-Kassner, personal communication, May 27, 2010). They may remain unaware that genres vary in rhetorical features and purposes, and that each comes with both formal and informal conventions. They will uncritically appropriate the views of others, believing that their own are unworthy to write down. Developing a sense of audience will be limited because they will neither seek nor trust the feedback from peers or others who will not stand in ultimate judgment of their work. Without agency, these students will not develop into writers who feel that they have the authority to approach their professors with questions about assignments, feedback, or grades. They will not learn how to stick up for themselves against those who hold more institutional power than they. All of these conclusions, culled from the interview transcripts and tutors' narratives about the effects of institutional demands for writing on students' composing processes, agencies, and identities, support my argument that tutors and students are excellent research partners whose insights will inform composition studies, instruction, and assessment in new ways. Furthermore, their insights show the important function writing centers should play in helping to inform writing instructors and those who study writing instruction and assessment.

Without agency, authority, or a community of peer writers, students remain mired in what Jeremy described as the loneliness of college writing. The reactions of students to the demands imposed upon them as writers clearly confirm Jeremy's observations. Tears, fears, despair, and attempting to become someone else are not behaviors that lead writers to success and may even lead students to drop out or end their bid for a career-making credential. Of course, the majority of professors do not wish those outcomes for their students. As tutors pointed out, however, there are writing instructors who see academia as a place where students either make it or do not. My hope is that instructors who want more for their students will take what tutors have said here and engage their own students in discussions about how instruction and assessment has failed them. One tutor spoke candidly about her failures as a basic writer over much of her secondary and post-secondary career. But she is now in a graduate English program and admits that her life could have taken a far different turn if not for supportive professors. As this and other tutors also show us, professors' reflection and support is not enough. Writing instructors may not be aware of how their pedagogies and assessment practices, which tutors acknowledged are partly shaped by long-standing hegemonies that exist within society and academe, exacerbate the loneliness for students, a loneliness that can often lead to their failure. This study offers students' perceptions of what needs to change in writing instruction and assessment. Scholars, compositionists, writing program administrators, and writing center directors may now listen to tutors' and students' voices and engage them in designing better, more student-centered, process-oriented norms for writing

instruction and assessment so that all students can become successful in the writing classroom and beyond.

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Appendix: Self-Assessment Inventory

Tutor Interviews

Title of Study: The Vernacular Architecture of Composition Instruction: What the Narratives of Tutors Reveal about the Influence of Standardized Writing Instruction and Assessment; Primary Investigator: Dawn Fels, Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate Studies in Composition and TESOL, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Bennett Rafoth

Today's Date: _____ Location: _____

Your name: (Your real name will not be used in the final report.)
Name of college: (Your institution's name will not be used in the final report.)
How long have you been a tutor?

What are you interested in accomplishing when working with a writer?

Please rank order the following to indicate what you are interested in accomplishing when working with a writer. Rank them from 1 (I am most interested in...) to 5 (I'm am least interested in...).

- _____ fulfilling the writer's needs and goals for their own writing
- _____ fulfilling the assignment's/professor's expectations for writing
- _____ fulfilling training and/or the director's expectations for working with writers
- _____ fulfilling my own expectations of how best to achieve the writers' needs and goals
- _____ fulfilling other expectations of what good writing is. Please list the other expectations that come to mind:

How would you characterize yourself as a tutor?

1. Circle the words that best describe you as a tutor.
2. Draw a line through those that do not.
3. In the open spaces, please add words that may also describe you as a tutor.

patient		directive
	non-directive	
good, active listener		approachable
	personable	
democratic		authoritative
	conversational	
friendly		writer-oriented
	conventional	
reflective		confident
	curious	
happy		participatory
	anti-racist	
standards-oriented		thorough