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Rework, Reuse, Reflect on Your Research: Writing Center and Library Collaborations

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REWORK, REUSE, REFLECT ON YOUR RESEARCH: WRITING CENTER AND LIBRARY COLLABORATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Wright State University Libraries restarted its collaborative partnership with the University Writing Center. Prior to Summer 2015, the University Writing Center had been located in the basement of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Library and the two groups worked together occasionally, but not regularly. Beginning in Summer 2015, the University Writing Center moved to the newly constructed Student Success Center building, where services focused on the success of students (especially in their first year) were relocated. Seizing the opportunity, the two groups implemented embedded librarians in the Writing Center four days a week to assist with students' research needs as a part of the research and writing process.

The continual growth of the partnership is referenced to highlight the value of utilizing both library and writing center support during the difficult process of research integration. We hope to further investigate opportunities for strengthening our partnership, promoting our services to the campus community, and making connections with other library-writing center collaborators throughout the country. Further research and planning will be required to establish proper training between librarians and writing center staff to strengthen the partnership.

RATIONALE FOR OUR APPROACH

Through a phone survey, Todorinova (2010) sought to establish information about the existence of writing centers on campuses, their relative location to the university library, and whether or not an existing collaboration between the library and writing center existed. Todorinova's results highlighted the existence of various collaborations, but the nature of those collaborations had not been reported.

As Todorinova (2010) and Hook (2005) both maintain, the research and writing processes are linked so significantly that without one, the other weakens. Clark (2008) observed that writing centers in the 21st century tend to become involved with students during later stages of the writing process. Collaboration between the library and the writing center, with an emphasis on information literacy, can lead to both tutors and librarians becoming involved with students' writing throughout their writing processes, increasing the potential for student success (Clark).

It is our goal to share our collaboration experience through various examples of how the partnership exists on our campus, and facilitate brainstorming activities on how to establish or revitalize a partnership between university libraries and writing centers. Through reflective practice on our individual strengths and abilities to impact student success, the partnership efforts between university libraries and writing centers can be better prepared to support students in integrating the research and writing processes.

WHAT PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT COLLABORATING

One of the common findings from our research, the national survey we recently completed, and the participants in the LOEX interactive session, is that collaboration is not uniform—there are varying ways to work together with other people and departments and there is a need for materials relating to these types of collaboration.

From the National Survey

In March 2016, we completed a national e-mail survey that garnered responses from 43 states and the District of Columbia (Jackson, 2016). The survey results showed that many campuses have some sort of writing tutoring services, whether it is an established writing center or a writing section of tutoring services. While the majority of the participants indicated that there was a collaboration of some sort between the writing tutoring group and the library, the level of involvement in the relationship varied from college to college. Some of the biggest areas that need improvement, based on responses, are communication and planning. There is a need for training methods and materials for collaborations like these. There were very few strategic goals and assessment methods shared, so the development of some best practices and shared ideas could be very beneficial. Along with these more research into how to successfully partner, while retaining individual identities, as in the case of schools with information commons areas, is also an area that could use some attention and planning.

From the LOEX Session

Many of the results from the national survey were echoed in our LOEX session—all of the session attendees indicated that they had a writing center (or a place for writing tutoring under a different title) and there were a variety of locations where these centers were located on campuses. However, 24 attendees indicated that there was an existing collaboration between the writing center and library, while 18 said that they did not have a partnership (though all 18 said that they believed it was possible to establish one). In the workshop, there was a higher percentage of institutions without a collaboration than was found in the national e-mail survey. When asked what they would like to see next, participants were predominantly interested in ways to collaborate between the two groups, training the people involved, promoting the partnership, and assessing the partnership. These are ideas that had also been shared from the national survey. One attendee, when asked what should be explored next, replied, "All? Very interested in training materials—so hard to create stuff that works!" Another responded that they were interested in "Collaborating to define our roles and explain those different roles to faculty, students, and administration." Table 1 shows the range of answers attendees selected as to what they would like to learn more about regarding library/writing center partnerships.

Table 1: What would you like to learn more about regarding library/writing center partnerships?

IMPLICATIONS

The common needs shared through the survey and the LOEX session show that there is an interest in collaboration between libraries and writing centers, but that some key areas need development and improvement. These are in line with what Thomas (2015) says about relationships – that they should involve "sharing processes, resources, and best practices" (p. 25). Other scholars (Brady, Singh-Corcoran, Dadisman, & Diamond, 2009; Escobar & Gauder, 2015) specifically believe that collaborations should include a focus on communication, teamwork, feedback, understanding of one another, documentation, and training, which directly relate to the results from the LOEX session. Ferer (2012) noted several areas of potential collaboration, including regular meetings, sharing space, librarians in the writing center, co-teaching, and assignment design. Ferer also specifically highlighted the need for input from writing center staff and tutors, as "there is not much written on this subject by staff working in writing centers or by those assisting students to improve their writing" (p. 553). At Wright State University, we have polled writing center tutors and staff during this first year of our partnership, and they reiterated the need for regular combined staff meetings with those involved, that librarians in the writing center are a good addition, and that they would be interested in co-teaching or co-presenting. If a college or university wants to have a successful partnership, soliciting and using feedback from all of those involved in the partnership is a definite best practice.

Different universities and colleges may not have the same needs when it comes to their student population, so not all activities are going to be best suited for each place, but could be adapted. Table 2 shows a comparison of known collaborative methods from library/writing center partnerships from the national survey and known collaborative methods from those polled at the LOEX session.

Table 2: Comparison of known collaborative methods in library/writing center partnerships

Several of the known collaborative methods are things that are common (e.g., library instruction, referrals, and orientations) and may be easy to overlook for possible collaboration opportunities. Instruction librarians are used to teaching and referring students and may already be involved in student orientations. Collaborating with the Writing Center offers a chance for both groups to highlight their individual strengths (research and writing) and to share and show how these two processes are really a part of one larger research/writing process.

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected from both our ongoing research and the LOEX session shows that there is an interest among college and university libraries and writing centers to collaborate, whether or not a partnership currently exists, though some factors of the collaboration could be explored further for prospective success. Materials that explore the creation of a collaborative partnership, training those involved, promoting the partnership, or even developing strategic goals and assessment methods are needed for both current and potential partnerships as they look toward the future.

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APPENDIX A: BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY SCENARIOS FROM SESSION

Part I:

1. A student goes to the Writing Center for help with her research paper. She has a general idea of what she wants to write about, but isn't finding many resources to help narrow her topic by searching on Google.
2. A student has come to the Library for help with his research paper. He submitted a draft already, but didn't get many good comments. His bibliography includes sources from sites like Wikipedia, Buzzfeed, and websites he found in a general Internet search. He doesn't have a firm grip of MLA or how to incorporate information from his sources.
3. A graduate student makes an appointment with a librarian because they are struggling with their thesis work. They are a non-native English speaker completing graduate work in the U.S. They aren't familiar with our databases and resources and also need help with grammar and clarity.
4. An art student came to the Writing Center for help with her paper. She has an image that she has to analyze. She isn't sure how to structure her paper or include sources.
5. A professor reaches out to the Library because their students have submitted their first papers of the semester and the quality of work has them concerned. The students aren't using the best sources and don't know how to incorporate them properly into their arguments.
6. At a department meeting, several faculty in the composition program mention that believe it would be beneficial for the librarians to add more information on brainstorming and crafting an effective introduction and conclusion into their presentation that they give to classes.

Part II:

1. A student goes to the Writing Center for help with her research paper. She has a general idea of what she wants to write about, but isn't finding many resources to help narrow her topic by searching on Google. After talking with a tutor, she begins to narrow her topic and is then referred to a librarian for finding sources. After the student has been helped, the tutor and librarian talk about the scenario and decide that it might be best to develop a workshop that can help others struggling in this area. How would you design a workshop to help others like this student?
2. A student has come to the Library for help with his research paper. He submitted a draft already, but didn't get many good comments. His bibliography includes sources from sites like Wikipedia, Buzzfeed, and websites he found in a general Internet search. He doesn't have a firm grip of MLA or how to incorporate information from his sources. You and the Assistant Director of the Writing Center talk about how students have a hard time telling what a good academic source is when they're used to seeing less academic articles posted on social media frequently, and that they aren't even sure how to cite a web article, let alone a database article. By the end of the conversation, the two of you have decided to put together a workshop that can be a stand-alone workshop or be incorporated into class presentations. How would you design a workshop to help students with these issues.
3. A graduate student makes an appointment with a librarian because they are struggling with their thesis work. They are a non-native English speaker completing graduate work in the U.S. They aren't familiar with our databases and resources and also need help with grammar and clarity. You speak with the student and realize that others might be struggling with these same resources. After calling the Writing Center Director, you come to the conclusion that it might be nice to work with international students in a small series of workshops to help with finding resources, both for their papers and on campus for their own development. What topics would you consider and how would you design one of them?
4. A student in a general education art history course came to the Writing Center for help with her paper. She has an image that she has to analyze and she isn't sure how to structure her paper or include sources. After a discussion about incorporating sources, the tutor refers the student to you, their subject librarian. You decide that it might be best to put together a joint presentation with the Writing Center that can be used in this general education course for help with the assignment. How would you design this presentation?
5. A professor reaches out to the Library because their students have submitted their first papers of the semester and the quality of work has them concerned. The students aren't using the best sources and don't know how to incorporate them properly into their arguments. How would you design a presentation for their class involving the Writing Center?
6. At a department meeting, several faculty in the composition program mention that believe it would be beneficial for the librarians to add more information on brainstorming and crafting an effective introduction and conclusion into their presentation that they give to classes. How would you design this presentation to include tutors?

APPENDIX B: LESSONS GENERATED FROM BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY

Part I:

2. A student has come to the Library for help with his research paper. He submitted a draft already, but didn't get many good comments. His bibliography includes sources from sites like Wikipedia, Buzzfeed, and websites he found in a general Internet search. He doesn't have a firm grip of MLA or how to incorporate information from his sources.

- Multiple issues going on: find better resources, incorporating sources into paper, etc.
- Good conversation opener with writing center; to bring tutors into library (and librarians into center)
- So much overlap between library and writing center in writing a research paper
- Training the writing center employees with a question like this

3. A graduate student makes an appointment with a librarian because they are struggling with their thesis work. They are a non-native English speaker completing graduate work in the U.S. They aren't familiar with our databases and resources and also need help with grammar and clarity.

Group 1	• Refer to Writing Center
	• Separate databases and resources and refer to Writing Center about grammar and clarity
	• What about clarity of sources, or how sources are used? How do they use evidence?
	• Teacher/Prof of Writing Center creating a class that prerequisite is an intro to, training sophomores, has them for 3 years fellows program, training & incorporated into ref desk
Group 2	• Formulation of the topic
	• One-on-one with the librarian
	• Database – start with general subject database
	• Create library/writing center joint workshops

4. An art student came to the Writing Center for help with her paper. She has an image that she has to analyze. She isn't sure how to structure her paper or include sources.

Group 1	• Talk with WC staff to see if this is a recurring question
	• Approach faculty for instruction if necessary
	• Also, more education for writing tutors
Group 2	• Meet with WC coordinator to discuss art assignment and plan to train tutors
	• Designate relevant materials to be kept in the library (art-specific writing materials)
	• Create and disseminate libguide info with designated citation tab

5. A professor reaches out to the Library because their students have submitted their first papers of the semester and the quality of work has them concerned. The students aren't using the best sources and don't know how to incorporate them properly into their arguments.

- Have librarians embedded into classroom
- Individual consultations
- Interview professor as to the details of assignment and class and the detailed issues
- Collaborative workshop between WC and librarians
- Tutorials
- Student/peer tutor workshops

Part II:

2. A student has come to the Library for help with his research paper. He submitted a draft already, but didn't get many good comments. His bibliography includes sources from sites like Wikipedia, Buzzfeed, and websites he found in a general Internet search. He doesn't have a firm grip of MLA or how to incorporate information from his sources. You and the Assistant Director of the Writing Center talk about how students have a hard time telling what a good academic source is when they're used to seeing less academic articles posted on social media frequently, and that they aren't even sure how to cite a web article, let alone a database article. By the end of the conversation, the two of you have decided to put together a workshop that can be a stand-alone workshop or be incorporated into class presentations. How would you design a workshop to help students with these issues?

- How to ensure attendance for workshop?
- Pair evaluation with citations workshop
- Market to Composition faculty or First year courses to give students extra credit
- Have peer tutors and student assistants from the library help brainstorm the workshop and plan it (and teach it)
- Bring food

- How to actually plan the lesson?
- Contact writing center faculty/staff to help co-teach a class (i.e. Writing staff teaching re: plagiarism, and librarian teaches evaluating and finding sources)
- Collaborating in digital learning objects – which addresses point-of-need learning

3. A graduate student makes an appointment with a librarian because they are struggling with their thesis work. They are a non-native English speaker completing graduate work in the U.S. They aren't familiar with our databases and resources and also need help with grammar and clarity. You speak with the student and realize that others might be struggling with these same resources. After calling the Writing Center Director, you come to the conclusion that it might be nice to work with international students in a small series of workshops to help with finding resources, both for their papers and on campus for their own development. What topics would you consider and how would you design one of them?

Group 1	• International students – how to make them show up?
	• First time, show up. Spring, no one showed. Hard to schedule, if you don't know what's scheduled.
	• Bulletin board to highlight theme, EBSCO resources, etc
	• LibGuides, embedding in Blackboard, certificate program?
	• Training students – takes a lot of work/time for librarians
Group 2	• Explain controlled vocabulary
	• Explain library jargon
	• Cover plagiarism, cultural differences
	• How to read an academic article
	• How to find an article by type (newspaper/journal)
	• Start from assumption that there is no knowledge of research, citation methods, paper construction
	• Cultural differences in perceptions of tutors/tutoring, considered shameful/embarrassing in some countries

4. A student in a general education art history course came to the Writing Center for help with her paper. She has an image that she has to analyze and she isn't sure how to structure her paper or include sources. After a discussion about incorporating sources, the tutor refers the student to you, their subject librarian. You decide that it might be best to put together a joint presentation with the Writing Center that can be used in this general education course for help with the assignment. How would you design this presentation?

Group 1	• Meet with necessary parties – librarian, writing tutor, and faculty member if possible (seeing assignment is a must, successful example would be nice)
	• Determine scope of outcomes
	• What tutors are subject specialists?
	• Scheduling with faculty member for workshops?
	OR
	Schedule time with faculty member to work on improving assignment to help student understanding of expectations
	• Create combined LibGuide for particulars of Art History writing and relevant resources
Group 2	• How to find sources
	• Find a piece of art
	• How to cite those sources
	• Include context…
	time period
	artist background
	evidence
	• *whole class analyzes one image together then talk about how to expand research
	o Active learning + composition + research + citations = ART
	o Group work and discussions

5. A professor reaches out to the Library because their students have submitted their first papers of the semester and the quality of work has them concerned. The students aren't using the best sources and don't know how to incorporate them properly into their arguments. How would you design a presentation for their class involving the Writing Center?

• Librarian:	• Writing Center:
o finding sources	o citation style
o using databases	o incorporating sources into paper (properly)
o keywording	o plagiarism

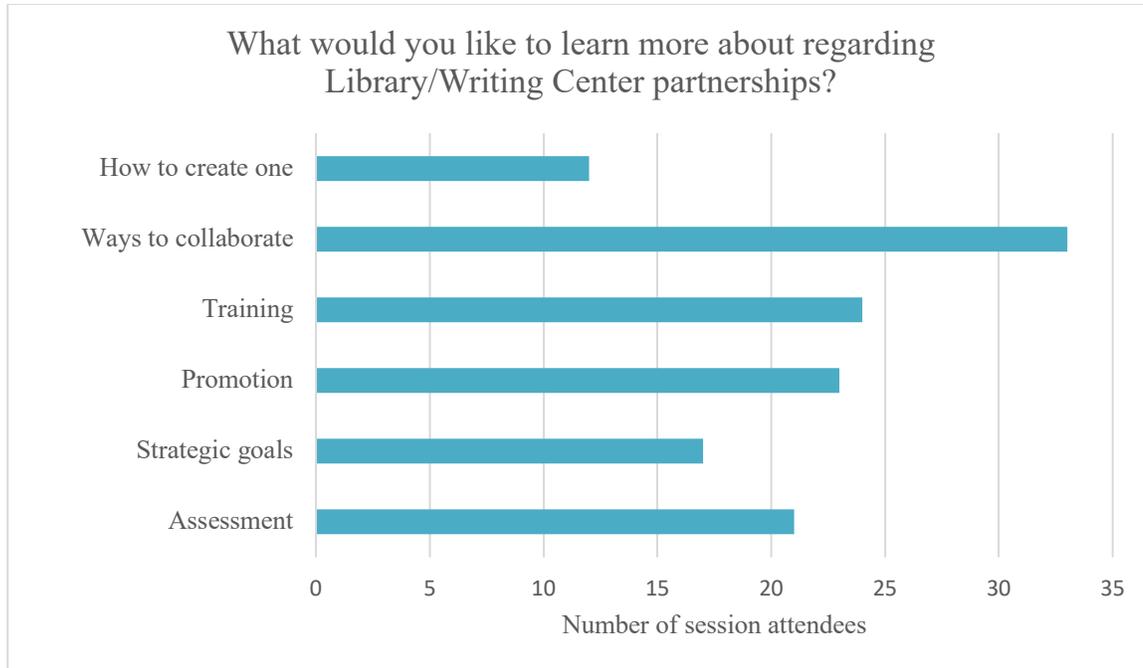# Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)

Table 1

What would you like to learn more about regarding Library/Writing Center partnerships?

(Bar chart — Number of session attendees)

Category	Number of session attendees
How to create one	12
Ways to collaborate	33
Training	24
Promotion	23
Strategic goals	17
Assessment	21

Table 2

Table 2: Comparison of known collaborative methods in library/writing center partnerships			
National Survey		**LOEX Session Survey**	
Type of collaboration	*# of participants*	*Type of collaboration*	*# of participants*
Library instruction/BI	49	Library instruction/BI	6
Individual student appointments	30	Individual student appointments	2
Student orientations or trainings	44	Student orientations or trainings	6
Faculty orientations or trainings	45	Faculty orientations or trainings	2
Classroom presentations	34	Classroom presentations	2
Community outreach	15	Community outreach	0
Embedded librarians in Writing Center	29	Embedded librarians in Writing Center	1
Embedded tutors in Library	41	Embedded tutors in Library	6
		Workshops	6
		Combined programming	7
		Referrals	14