

# THE DYNAMIC DUO: COLLABORATION BETWEEN WRITING CENTERS AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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This session makes the case for extensive collaboration between academic libraries and campus writing centers. The complementary nature of research and writing makes it natural for these two entities to work together in pursuit of institutional goals for student success. This interrelatedness yields several possible avenues for collaboration. Below we discuss the writing center's place in the learning commons, collaborative initiatives for library and writing center programming, and collaborative efforts to provide helpful resources for students.

## PRESENTER #1

WENDELL BARBOUR, DEAN OF LIBRARY AND LEARNING SERVICES, LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY

For the past fifteen years, libraries have been struggling with a growing problem: the perception that all the information one needs for academic work is freely accessible via the Web to anyone with a personal computer. This perception has led many potential library users to the erroneous conclusion that libraries are superfluous to their information needs. If we want students back in libraries, libraries will have to change accordingly.

One increasingly popular strategy for adapting to this change involves the transformation of the library into a learning commons: a space designed to provide a holistic, interactive, collaborative learning environment. Among other things, this change involves giving patrons easy access to individuals trained to assist with these functions: librarians, IT professionals,

and academic coaches, especially writing center personnel. Recent scholarship suggests that when libraries and writing centers work closely together, there is significant potential to provide improved support for the investigative, reflective, and presentational phases of student inquiry (Elmborg, 2005; Hook, 2005; Norgaard, 2004).

It is easiest to capitalize fully on this potential when library and writing center services are housed together with other services under one roof. Having these services in close proximity fosters a synergy among personnel that can translate into more sophisticated support for each group's clientele. The subsequent sections of this paper provide examples that demonstrate this synergy at work. The communication necessary to pursue such innovations is much easier when library and writing center services, for example, are conveniently close.

In addition to facilitating intellectual exchange between the two groups, sharing space also makes it easier to provide more comprehensive service to each group's constituents. Because research and writing are closely intertwined, opportunities for referrals arise frequently when working with students: a research need may be brought to light during a session with a writing tutor, or students may bring questions about writing strategies to the reference desk. It is much easier to make an effective referral if the desired service is a few feet away rather than in another part of campus. Furthermore, writing centers in particular stand to benefit from having a presence within the learning commons. Libraries tend to be centrally located and to keep their facilities open later than other services on campus. A presence in the library makes the writing center a more visible and convenient service than if it were cloistered away in the basement of the modern languages building. In return, libraries benefit from having the writing center close at hand, as this arrangement brings them one step closer to actualizing the idea of the learning commons as a place where students and faculty can find support for all aspects of their academic work.

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Although physical proximity between the two services enhances the possibilities for working together, attempts at collaboration are not necessarily doomed to failure if the writing center is located outside the library. Successful collaboration can still occur. However, it will take more work for both parties to succeed in providing services and resources along the lines mentioned below.

### **PRESENTERS #2 & #3:**

**DEBRA HOFFMANN, ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN FOR REFERENCE AND INSTRUCTION SERVICES AND KATHLEEN KLOMPIEN, COORDINATOR, UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER, CSU CHANNEL ISLANDS.**

The unique aspects of CSU Channel Islands as an institution (namely its newness, small size and campus missions of interdisciplinarity and experiential learning) enable the library to fulfill its *unofficial* missions of networking, creating and sustaining cross-disciplinary connections and being a visible and important social and cultural presence on campus. Unique library programs and activities, including two annual faculty receptions hosted by the library serve to connect the library with faculty and lay the groundwork for further collaborations between the library and other campus programs and services.

The way Debra and Kathleen came together to collaborate is directly related to the library's 24-hour service during finals. When Kathleen requested that writing center tutors offer their services in the library during its extended hours, Debra helped to coordinate and publicize the service. Even though the utilization of the tutors during the extended hours was a bit lower than hoped, this entrée into collaboration helped illuminate the potential for future projects. In the fall of 2006, the writing center coordinator invited library faculty to attend a tutor training session. The purpose of this meeting was to help peer tutors come to better understand the services offered in the library and the importance of recommending that students seek help with their research in the library. While all of the writing tutors at the CSUCI writing center are experienced writers and good students, they tend to under-utilize the library and the help it offers in researching topics. The intention in this cross training was not to make the writing tutors into "junior librarians," but instead to help them to see where their assistance as writing tutors ended and where the role of a research librarian could begin. This meeting was fruitful for all participants because it helped illustrate the connections between the work done in the writing center and the library.

It is not always clear when a student should see a writing tutor and when she should see a librarian. The two are interconnected—both are concerned about the topics students choose, the appropriateness of the sources students choose in responding to their topics, the ways they integrate sources, and the ways they cite those sources. Yet the two talk to students about these issues in different ways, from different perspectives.

The next foray into collaboration involved an activity common to writing centers and composition programs—looking at student papers together. Kathleen invited library faculty and

composition faculty to attend a writing center meeting where the focus was on how successfully students fulfilled the criteria for research in their writing. The group made these determinations by using the scoring rubric designed by the composition faculty at CSUCI.

The inclusion of librarians at these writing center/composition faculty meetings has been one of the most successful partnerships between the writing center and library. The opportunity for librarians to hear from tutors and faculty, view the scoring rubric, as well as review student papers has been invaluable. Aside from orientations, librarians rarely have the opportunity to know which sources students are choosing or how these sources are being integrated into papers.

For the teaching librarian, this experience can be eye-opening and informative, and suggest further possibilities. In working with students, librarians can augment what they already do in the classroom to include such skills as integration and evaluation of sources, rather than simply how to locate sources. With regard to faculty, librarians can review class syllabi and rubrics to determine the extent to which research is a component of a given class, and then work with faculty to design research components for courses or adjust their library orientations to meet the specific research needs of a particular class.

This is only a brief look at the early collaborations between a librarian and a writing center coordinator in a setting that is very open to collaboration. Attitudes toward collaboration vary a great deal from campus to campus. The kinds of collaborations explored today may not be possible at every campus at this time. However, collaboration can take many forms, and there are many ways in which librarians and writing center representatives can work together. One simple idea would be for the two parties to have coffee or lunch and discuss how the writing center and the library help students. These initial collaborations have illustrated that this is a rich area for research and study that could lead to better understanding about the nature of writing center and library work and, most importantly, to improve service to students.

### **PRESENTERS #4 AND #5**

**MARK LENKER, ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN FOR INSTRUCTION AND REFERENCE SERVICES AND LISA BURNS, TUTOR COORDINATOR, LEARNING CENTER, LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY**

Not only does collaboration enhance the quality of service that writing centers and libraries can offer, it also has the potential to improve the caliber of resources that libraries and writing centers provide for their clientele. If Hook (2005) and Norgaard (2004) are correct in identifying the intended recipients of library and writing center services as students engaged in "writing as a mode of inquiry," it only makes sense that librarians and writing center personnel working together should select and produce more responsive resources than either could working separately. Collaboration makes both groups better because each enjoys a different perspective on the student's experience of "writing with sources." Librarians tend to work most often with students in the initial phases of their research projects: topic

selection and location and evaluation of research sources. Writing center personnel, on the other hand, have the opportunity to work with students as they incorporate those resources into their own thought through iterative phases of drafting and revision (often after the student has received feedback from her professor on the quality of her work). Melding these perspectives into a comprehensive understanding of the student's experience should facilitate the creation and selection of resources that effectively provide for the student's needs.

An example from Longwood University illustrates how reference and instruction librarians in particular stand to benefit from the insight of writing center personnel. Longwood University is a state institution serving approximately 4,000 undergraduate students and more than 1,000 graduate students. Because of this intimate setting and an 18:1 student/teacher ratio, Longwood tends to draw a fair number of students with learning disabilities. In fact, more than 9 % of its undergraduates, slightly higher than the national average, have self-identified with the Office of Disability Support. While the average SAT score is 1085 and rising steadily each year, Longwood is still experiencing an increasing number of students with gaps in college preparedness. This population, coupled with the growing number of exchange students, led to an examination of how students' writing and research needs were being met. As the account below suggests, the authors are constantly finding new opportunities to improve services.

Mark was assigned to lead a one-shot session for a class composed of exchange students from Anhui University of Technology in Ma'an Shan, China. The professor for this class requested that the discussion cover plagiarism avoidance and proper citation procedures. Her concern was that the students' cultural and educational backgrounds did not prepare them to observe Western conventions for respecting intellectual property (for a provocative discussion on the legitimacy of this concern, see Sowden, 2005; Liu, 2005; and Ha, 2006). Mark developed a session to meet the objectives set forth by the professor. Classroom activities included a handout with citation exercises that he thought might be appropriate for first-year students. These exercises started with a problem that required students to identify the various fields of a sample APA citation (author, date of publication, etc.). During class, it quickly became clear that the students were lost. (For a look at one of the exercises, see Appendix)

The students' difficulty with such exercises was cause for concern. Most citation aids that libraries refer to on the Web, whether they be citation generators (e.g., KnightCite, NoodleBib or RefWorks) or lists of representative examples of citations (e.g., "Citation Style for Research Papers" at <http://www.liu.edu/CWIS/CWP/library/workshop/citation.htm>) require that students be able to identify those bits of information associated with each field in a citation form. The exchange students' performance in class indicated that they were at a serious disadvantage when using these tools for assistance with their citations.

Mark mentioned his concern for the students in the exchange program to Lisa, Tutor Coordinator for Longwood's

Learning Center (which includes the campus writing center as one of its services). After looking at the exercises Mark had used in class, Lisa told him that many American students would have been bewildered by the exercises as well. They theorized that citation was one of those skills that "slipped between the cracks" for many students. Perhaps professors thought students should have learned to cite sources in high school, while high school teachers assumed that it would be covered in college. Regardless of the circumstances, many students were inadequately prepared to compose formal citations, and it was decided that the library and the writing center should work together to address that gap in students' skills.

After reviewing varied student experiences, the authors determined that an online visual resource would be the proper solution, especially since these same students also have a tendency to seek information and assistance in the final hours before an assignment is due. This tutorial would illustrate the basics of locating the elements required to complete proper citations for the most widely used resources: books, journals, magazines and Web sites. It would also help the students avoid accidental plagiarism.

First, the authors wanted topics that would maintain the interest of the viewer. For the pilot version of the project, a book was chosen on common dating mistakes and a journal article was chosen that sought the answer to the age-old question, "Do nice guys finish last?" It was also important that the video resource be accessible to persons with disabilities, so several VOD layouts were reviewed for captioning to be inserted later. Utility was also a major factor; therefore, the video would be broken into chapters and labeled with the duration.

Throughout the collaboration, adherence to a schedule and clear communication were the most valuable steps in a process that sometimes faltered. Breakdowns in communication occurred when the authors assumed that the video editor had a clear understanding of citation and the project layout. When collaborating, it is advised not to assume that all parties have the same knowledge level in various disciplines. It is best to provide detailed information so that no one is excluded or misinformed.

The video, *cite me!*, is currently in the production phase. The initial draft, addressing the citation of a text and a journal article is a straight informational cut, while a more relational draft is being developed. A test of both formats is planned to assess student preference. The remaining segments—magazines and Web sites—will be developed based on student response.

Readers are encouraged to visit the wiki established to continue this discourse on collaborations between academic libraries and writing centers at <http://dynamicduo.pbwiki.com>. The site contains links to many creative collaborative projects for exploration and a full bibliography of resources reviewed. Upcoming versions of *cite me!* will also be posted upon their completion. Share a favorite resource or project by logging on to the wiki.

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## APPENDIX

### *Journal Article from an Online Database*

Harris, B. R. (2005). Credit where credit is due: Considering ethics, ethos, and process in library instruction on attribution. *Education Libraries*, 28(1), 4-11. Retrieved October 6, 2006, from Wilson OmniFile: Full-text Select.

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