

News from the Writing Center: 402 Neville Hall

Travelling over 900 miles in back-to-back weekends, undergraduate tutors from the University of Maine Writing Center presented their ongoing research at two academic conferences. Along with valuable experience, these students garnered acclaim for our institution and represented Maine's flagship university with authentic scholarship and professionalism.

Drawing on the ethnographic research they began with Writing Center Director Paige Mitchell in Eng. 395, a capstone level internship devoted to training peer-tutors, the tutors presented on three areas in which the Writing Center might better serve the needs of the authors they serve. Fellowships from CLAS and CUGR were instrumental in supporting this research, and their presentations represent only the beginning of the dividends likely to come from the institutional investment in the Writing Center and its tutors.

The first conference they attended was organized by the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA). Held on March 24 at the picturesque Point Lookout Conference Center in Northport Maine, MCELA brought teachers and educators from all over the state to present and discuss the conference theme of "Embracing the Art of ELA through Reflective Practice."

The following weekend, these tutors travelled to the 2017 conference of the Northeast Writing Centers Association (NEWCA), which was held at Pace University, in Pleasantville, New York. At the conference, the group from Maine engaged in workshops, panels, and discussions centered around the theme of "Writing in the Margins: Language, Labor, Class."

In their presentation, "Major Classism: Intertextual Binaries Among CLAS and STEM Ideologies," Molly Masters, Cara Morgan, and Parker Midura explored ways to break the binary between STEM and the humanities. How can the Writing Center, predominantly staffed by English majors, better support students who are majoring in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math? Although writing is not foregrounded in these majors, it plays a large role in the lives of these students. Publishing scientific papers, writing proposals, and communicating with others in their field will, after graduation, continue to be the work of students in these fields, and so it is imperative that the Writing Center cater to the needs of these students.

Emma Barnes and Catherine Gottwalt's presentation, "The Creative Writing Class in the Writing Center." Examined the Writing Center as a potential place to work with more than strictly academic essays. Emma and Catherine ask, How can the Writing Center incentivize creative writers to utilize our service? And, how do we construct tutoring sessions that focus on the perspectives and voices of these writers? Their research analyzed divergent genres of creative writing and focused on distinct tutorial strategies to support fiction writers and poets. They focused on fostering a culture conducive to attracting creative writers to the Writing Center, which has yet to be successful, even though the predominant number of our peer-tutors major in creative writing.

In the final presentation, "Misinterpreting English: Seeking a Socioeconomic Equality," Amelia Reinhardt, Brady Andrews, and Tyler O' Keefe contribute to writing center pedagogy by

researching tutoring approaches that are multi-paradigm and multilingual. Amelia's research focuses on methods to engender English Language Learner (ELL) linguistic equality by examining how students counteract assimilation to dominant, socio-political communicative codes. Brady's work investigates effects of combining three prominent linguistic paradigms to help raise diverse writer's critical awareness of how they process composition and communication. Tyler's research explores factors that influence students' opinions of English studies so that we may better address negative conceptions and enhance productivity of writing center tutorials. Together, these students aim to refine the writing center's critical awareness from the ground up to improve conditions for students of all disciplines.

The Writing Center is honored to have such dedicated and talented students. They finished off their presentation season with a final presentation at the CUGR symposium at the Cross Insurance Center on April 24th. From there, most tutors will submit their research for publication, and they will mentor the new cohort of tutors-in-training during the fall peer-tutor training internship of 2017.

We are sincerely grateful to CUGR and CLAS for supporting our tutors with generous research fellowships. We also owe thanks to the English department and our IRB faculty, who ensured that each tutor's research projects were ethical, strongly grounded in research, and likely to deliver meaningful benefits for each population. And finally, we owe deep gratitude to Professor Virginia Ness-Hatlen for supporting conference travel and professional development for our undergraduate tutors with the Welsh-Evermann fund. In addition, since the aforementioned fund is strictly for undergraduates presenting at conferences, Professor Ness-Hatlen also generously funded Alex Mooney and Peter Lowe, an undergraduate and graduate tutor, who have presented at prior conferences, and who wanted to continue their professional development. These students wrote proposals, to which Professor Ness-Hatlen generously offered feedback and financial support. We wish her our sincere appreciation and admiration.

Thank you to everyone in our campus community for your encouragement, support, and commitment. Writing Centers thrive on active and engaged communities. It is because of everyone's genuine encouragement that our students are able to excel in the ways they do, and serve the community by giving back something greater than themselves.