

Morgan Tidd

Job Title: Peer Tutor

Class Standing: Fourth Year, Undergraduate

University of Maine in Orono's Writing Center

“In Writing Centers, We Change Views”

I always arrive at least five minutes early to the University of Maine in Orono's Writing Center. It's a haul up the four flights of stairs, but I have learnt over the year that I've been tutoring that being early is necessary. I sit behind the main desk, if it is unoccupied, and when the seat is taken, I try to sit as close to it as possible. This is crucial.

I am not the face you expect to see when you come in for a tutorial. Heavy black eyeliner, lipstick alternating between brilliant reds and popping magentas, two lip piercings, dyed blue bangs that have faded into a sick green, old Doc Marten combat boots. I am the stereotypical punk kid that gets followed around the small convenient stores, the one that parents tend to glare at. I'll admit, my face has scared a fair number of children. It is not one of typical scholarly quality. I forget this sometimes and so, as previously mentioned, I have learnt that if I don't sit at or near the center's desk, recognizing my tutees will be difficult.

For example, during my first semester tutoring, before I settled into my now routine, I arrived early to the writing center and took a seat at one of the many long tables in the room. It was empty, but people tend to come and go, sometimes for a tutorial sometimes just for a quiet place to write. I began reading through some edits on my poetry from the workshop class I had just left when an older lady walked in and took a seat. My mistake here was not speaking to her, but as a new tutor I was not sure whether she was a tutor as well or if she was using the room for her own writing. I made eye contact with her and she quickly looked away. Thirty minutes passed, my tutee who had made an appointment seemed to be a no show. The lady cleared her throat, looked away from her laptop, and asked me, "Are you waiting for a tutor as well?" My stomach sank. I shook my head and forced a laugh, "No, *I'm* the tutor." She no longer looked impressed as I approached and sat down beside her, apologizing for the mistake and offering to stay longer to make sure she was helped sufficiently. After an awkward pause, the woman insisted that she "only needed help with Word document" despite writing in her appointment that she needed someone to look for the paper for details and what not. She refused to let me see the paper and we spent about ten minutes working out different quirks about Word. I was not the tutor she was expecting and my mistake only worsened this fact.

This may be the most extreme of my interactions at the writing center, but not the only one. I've been greeted with wide eyes, skepticism, and disregard, among other things. There was one tutee who remained silent the whole tutorial, leaving my questions unanswered and sneaking nervous glances at me when I was reading her paper. I have come to accept this - I am not the tutor these people expect. However, I do not let this hinder the job I do for my university. Being recognized as something people expect has never been one of my priorities and, this is one of my favorite parts of being a peer tutor.

My appearance serves as a sense of relief for some people. They come in, new to the center, nervous about their writing, and I can see a sort of wave of relaxation wash over them when they see me behind the desk. My face is familiar, one that certain people can relate to. The students who arrive, expecting a stern and unapproachable tutor, always seem surprised to see me, in a positive way. Maine is not the most progressive of places and so, in a place that has been slow to accept people whose appearance is against the general norm, it is a relief for some students to see me behind that desk. There have been a number of people who return again and again to me

for tutorials. These tutorials are what makes it worth it for me: not only being able to help people strengthen their writing, but also being able to show them that you can be that punk riot girl and still be a tutor, that you don't have to choose. I know how to assist people in the revisions of their papers and my appearance does not change that.

The University of Maine's Writing Center has been an important aspect in the shaping of my career. All my life, I have heard that someday I will have to "grow up," to change my hair, to lose my piercings, if I ever wanted to find an actual job. In other words, I have been dismissed as looking unprofessional in comparison with today's social norms and will not be taken seriously. However, the writing center has proven this to be wrong, for the most part. Not only does the center provide me a space in which I can assist people with their writing - something I feel passionately about - but it has accepted me for who I am and how I look. Even if this is a small step, it still provides a push forward in showing other students that they do not have to change their appearance to find work in their fields of interest.

The other day, a new tutee came in, looked at me, and exclaimed, "Oh! You're the girl with all the Doc Martens!" Yes, I am the one with all the Doc Martens, with the blue hair, with the piercings. And, I am your tutor.