

When I was told about the NEWCA conference in New Jersey, the first thing on my mind was to avoid going at all costs. I hadn't even been a tutor for a whole semester and the thought of presenting my "work" in front of an audience seemed anything but enjoyable. Besides, I highly doubted that anyone there would care one way or another about my thoughts on tutoring and I couldn't blame them for that. I told the Writing Center director, Paige Mitchell, that I would *think* about it and then promptly stopped thinking about it.

However, Paige did not let the subject die that easily and signed me up for the conference despite my lack of interest. I had no choice but to comply and, looking back on it, I am so glad I did. The preparation for the conference was time-consuming. Many drafts of talking points and power points were made, many hours spent rehearsing what I was going to say and how, many hours spent worrying about presenting. Once the order of the presentation was decided on, my anxiety grew as I would be the first among the peer tutors to speak. I had never done any sort of public speaking outside of the small in-class presentations which were already scary enough for me. I could not picture it ending without me doing one of the following: crying, fainting, or fleeing the room. Luckily, I was wrong.

The night before the conference, Ben, Maddie, and I all stayed up until midnight going over our parts of the presentation. Coffee could cure exhaustion, but nothing could make up for a lack of practice. Finding the correct building proved difficult the next day, but since I am still learning to navigate around my own campus, that was no surprise for me. We were in the first wave of presentations that day; something that made me happy because then I could enjoy the rest of my weekend without the nerves...unless, of course, I messed up badly and would be remembered (and I happen to be very recognizable with blue hair) as the person who messed up really badly by anyone who happened to be present. Five minutes before it was time to begin only a few people had shown up and I couldn't help but be relieved. The relief was short-lived. Right as Paige began to introduce the panel to the audience, a flow of people entered the room – so many that extra chairs were required. I felt my heart drop.

When it was my turn to start to present, my hands were shaking as I looked down at my papers of talking points on which I had written words of encouragement such as "you got this" and "don't forget to look up!" I took a deep breath and began. It was a rough start and I got so discouraged after stumbling over a few words that I pictured myself rising from my seat in front of the full room and making a mad dash for the nearest exit. The door wasn't that far away, after all. This vision was quickly followed by one of what I imagined Paige's facial expression would be if I did leave and that was enough to keep me in my seat. I took another deep breath, told myself that all these people were here to learn from me and my fellow peer tutors, not to make us nervous, and continued with my presentation. When I was finished, I felt incredibly accomplished and relieved. There were no tears, I did not faint, and I did not leave in the middle of it. It went much better, despite the few stumbles, than I could have ever hoped. After the other peer tutors finished, the audience had a list of questions with which they could engage. The room filled with talking and it was obvious to all of us how involved and interested the audience was with what we had been researching. A few people approached me and asked questions about certain aspects of my research, wanted to hear my opinions on what they had been wondering

previous to this conference. Not being taken seriously by the other people attending had been one of my largest fears, and it was dissolved immediately after the presentation. People – including professors, graduate students, and other peer tutors – attended, listened, and took the information and research I had done seriously. Few things have ever felt better than that.

The rest of the weekend was just as successful. I attended many other panels and learned invaluable information on which other Writing Centers have been researching as well as a wide variety of tutoring tactics. All of these things I brought back with me when I returned to UMO's Writing Center. It was interesting, as well, to see writing centers as a community and how they come together to share different topics and concerns that have arisen in the centers. Without a doubt, I would attend and (hopefully) present at another conference in the future. All of the hard work, nervousness, and traveling paid off with an incredible experience.