Taking an Expansive View of Accessibility: The Writing Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver

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Abstract: The Writing Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver, which serves a diverse population, rejects the accommodation model, which depends upon disclosure of difference, in favor of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which assumes difference exists and plans in advance for it. Hiring, tutoring, space design, and marketing efforts have been aligned with principles of UDL in an effort to make the Writing Center accessible to people with a wide range of (dis)abilities, including linguistic diversity, social anxiety, and gaps in academic literacy.

This article is dedicated to Lucas Dembicki, peer tutor, research assistant, and friend.

The Writing Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) has made accessibility and inclusivity cornerstones of its policies and practices. In this program profile, I will discuss why the MSU Denver Writing Center rejects the accommodation model, which hinges on disclosure of any difference by the student and then accommodation of that difference by the tutor, and embraces the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which assumes difference exists and plans in advance for it. I will then share how UDL has informed our hiring, tutoring, space design, and marketing. I will close with lessons learned and recommendations for others seeking to make their writing centers and other student support services more inclusive.

I begin with the assumption that disability is a social construction, understanding it less as a condition that exists in an individual and more as a set of barriers and attitudes that construct some people as "disabled." As Margaret Price eloquently explains in *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life,* disability is "a mode of human difference, one that becomes a problem only when the environment or context treats it as such" (4). Once disability is understood as simply another form of difference, it is not much of a leap to then understand it as part of diversity. When writing centers treat disability as diversity, it becomes easier to understand removing barriers to access for people who have different abilities as social justice rather than a burdensome task dictated from above by legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. When I aim to make every student feel welcomed (Burgstahler), rather than to comply with laws and regulations, I find this work to be inspiring and energizing. I am much more able to greet the challenges in ensuring access with optimism.

The Writing Center at MSU Denver

MSU Denver is a large, urban university that attracts a diverse population of about 22,000 students a year, mostly part-time, with an average age of 25. For students aged 20 and over, MSU Denver is open-enrollment, admitting any student with a high school diploma or GED, regardless of GPA or test scores. For students 19 and younger, some GPA and test score requirements are taken into account; the overall acceptance rate for all applicants is 64%. Our students often lack the preparation typically associated with academic success. The students attracted by our mission and geography consist of many students of color (34%) and first-generation students (32%). We have a high number of veterans, many of whom suffer from PTSD, and students with both diagnosed and undiagnosed disabilities. Many of our students struggled in high school or at other colleges and universities before landing at MSU Denver.

The Writing Center is located administratively in the English department, which is part of the College of Letters, Arts,

and Sciences, one of four colleges at the University. The Writing Center serves students from across the University. Many students learn about the Writing Center in their first-year writing course, which typically features a 15-minute Writing Center orientation during the first month. About half of our students transfer in, having taken their first-year writing course elsewhere, and so therefore, not having that orientation. To reach those students, we count on faculty to promote the Writing Center by mentioning it in syllabi and assignments or inviting the Writing Center into their class to do an orientation or workshop on an issue related to writing.

The Writing Center records about 5000 appointments a year. The default length of our tutorials is 40-minutes, but students registered with the disability services office can request 60-minute sessions. In addition to orientations and tutorials, we also do workshops two or three times a semester on general writing topics, such as managing a large writing project and citing sources; these workshops are advertised on our website and by email to the students in our appointment database. Upon request of a faculty member, we will also do a workshop in a class specific to a writing assignment for that class; for example, an instructor in the department of Human Services often requests an in-class workshop on writing case studies.

The Writing Center and Accessibility

Because of the wide range of diversity in background and preparation of our students, the Writing Center takes a very broad view of accessibility, implementing practices that take into account a wide range of (dis)abilities, including those that may not be typically recognized as disabilities but certainly impact access to education, such as linguistic diversity, social anxiety, and gaps in academic literacy. This attitude toward inclusivity and accessibility has evolved over time during my tenure as director. When I first came to the position in 2009, I took a more conventional approach, devoting a portion of tutor training and development to working with students with disabilities and tutoring multilingual students, but isolating those trainings as "special situations." This is exactly the approach criticized by Kiedaisch and Dinitz; in reflecting on their own labeling of "special situations," they ask, "In considering learning disabilities and whether English is a first language as 'special cases' or 'differences,' were we implicitly suggesting, despite our rhetoric, that as a group, we tutors represented the 'norm'—and that our role was to help 'them' become like 'us'?" (42).

Beginning in 2011, a confluence of circumstances pushed me toward reframing how the Writing Center engages with students with disabilities, linguistic differences, and other markers of difference, and I would be remiss if I did not disclose that my own challenges with low vision played a role. Initially, I fell into the trap Stephanie Kerschbaum identifies of "treating difference as a stable thing or property that can be identified and fixed in place" (619), but in my efforts to normalize my own vision issues, I found myself having to question and rethink how "normalcy" in general is constructed.

As Writing Center Director, I have designed our policies and practices to normalize difference and identify and remove barriers. Rather than reacting to difference through accommodation, the Writing Center's practices aim to invite and welcome all MSU Denver students by drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning. As I will explain in more detail below, UDL aims to reduce obstacles to students accessing and engaging with instructional materials, regardless of (dis)ability.

Rejecting the Accommodation Model

The traditional way to deal with disability—or any kind of perceived difference—in educational settings is through accommodation. The accommodation model hinges on students disclosing a disability to their teacher; the teacher then accommodates the disability as gracefully as possible. For example, if a student has disclosed that they are colorblind, a teacher giving an in-class exam may label diagrams in which the color conveys meaning. For less apparent or less widely understood differences, accommodation may be more complicated, such as could be the case with a student who discloses a condition that affects their cognitive processing. A teacher in that case may wonder if giving the student with a cognitive processing condition more time to complete the in-class exam constitutes giving them an unfair advantage over other students. Considering other types of differences complicates the matter even further; should a student who speaks English as a second or third language be given more time to complete the exam?

Difficulty with figuring out what kinds of accommodations make sense is not the only drawback to the accommodation model. Perhaps the most complicated aspect of the accommodation model is its reliance on disclosure of difference. The accommodation model depends upon disclosure, with accommodation being contingent upon disclosure, and often additional requirements being placed on the student, such as medical documentation of the disability. Not only

does this model deny the real and perceived emotional and social costs of disclosure on an individual, it can place financial costs on a student who may not be able to afford the medical tests and consultations that might need to happen to get the medical documentation. This model stigmatizes difference and places multiple burdens on the student.

Whether or not to disclose a disability is a very personal decision, and students may decide that the real or perceived stigma, judgment of professors, or lack of confidentiality surrounding disclosure (Lauffer) are not worth the constant "coming out" a student with disabilities has to engage in. For example, when Stark and Wilson interviewed four student writers with diagnosed ADHD, they found that all four had chosen to not disclose their ADHD diagnoses to their tutors. They explain, "Students with ADHD and their tutors have been exposed to people, including teachers, thinking the condition is not real, that it is over-diagnosed, and that it is over-medicated." The students Stark and Wilson talked to felt that the stigma of ADHD outweighed the potential benefits of disclosing their diagnoses to their tutors.

Kerri Rinaldi articulates another significant issue with this model in a writing center setting: the disclosure of disability and then the accommodation of that disability becomes the focus of the session, rather than the student, in all their intersectional complexity, being the focus. Rinaldi explains,

> This line of thinking wrongly positions the disability as the most important thing to adjust for, the issue that must be addressed first before the *real* work can begin. Disability then becomes an "extra" component in the session—one that is negative, challenging, or scary—that must be worked around rather than accepted as a part of that writer.

Rinaldi further articulates how the disclosure/accommodation model undermines the student's agency: "Instead of considering the disabled student as an expert of the self, the accommodation model relies on disclosure and the tutor's knowledge" of how to accommodate the disclosed disability. This reifies hierarchies of authority, with the tutor being the authority, that most writing centers work so hard to mitigate.

For these reasons, I believe we cannot and should not rely on disclosure. While students are more likely to disclose when they perceive that their professor—and I assume, tutor—is supportive and positive about disability (Cole and Cawthorn), depending upon disclosure to determine the most effective strategies to use with a particular student is simply not realistic. While it can be helpful when students do disclose their disabilities (Babcock; Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels), it doesn't always happen and so tutors cannot count on it. Further, the disclosure of a disability the tutor is unfamiliar with can quickly derail a session, turning it into a fact-finding mission for the tutor who wants to learn more about the disability itself rather than how to work productively with the student.

UDL reduces the importance of disclosure. Tutors need to build a repertoire of strategies for working with students who may or may not have disabilities and may or may not choose to disclose. As Babcock reminds us, "common peer tutoring practices such as reading papers aloud ... may exclude the deaf student and others who process language differently" (28). She suggests that when working with a student with a hearing differing, "try to find out what the deaf person needs and wants out of the session, and gear your tutoring toward that" (35). She also suggests that nondirective techniques and the ways tutor check for understanding may be different. These suggestions can be broadly applied to most tutoring sessions and do not rely on a student disclosing a disability. Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels suggest inviting disclosure by opening all tutorials with a question about "anything specific that they would like the tutor to know about themselves or their writing" (22).

Universal Design for Learning Theory

Students often respond to questions such as the one suggested by Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels not with disclosure of (dis)abilities, but with descriptions of strategies that help them learn. The tutor can immediately apply this information in a session, for instance, opting to prompt a student who mentions a preference for visual aids to sketch out a diagram of their argument and asking a student who says they do their best thinking while moving to conduct their session while walking in the hallway. These are examples of UDL, which provides options to students to help them access content, engage with concepts, and demonstrate understanding, the key idea being that all students should not be required to access content in exactly the same way. A student who prefers to learn through visual methods, for example, should have the option of seeing material presented through images as well as through lecture.

UDL is based on the ideas of Universal Design in architecture, which were created by Ron Mace (Rose et al.). The idea behind Universal Design is to make buildings accessible to everyone, "considering the needs of their buildings'

potential users at the outset," and by doing such, architects could design buildings that would not later need to be retrofitted to accommodate visitors in wheelchairs or with other types of disabilities (Rose et al.). By integrating both a ramp and a staircase into a building's entrance, for example, an architect can ensure that everyone who wants to access the building can do so. While someone in a wheelchair would obviously benefit from the ramp, so would a parent pushing a stroller, a person using a wheeled bag, and a person recovering from an injury such as a sprained ankle. The ramp does not prevent anyone from using the stairs, so people who are able to use stairs can choose to use either them or the ramp. The availability of the ramp does not hinder anyone's access to the building, and if it is included as part of the original design, it can be integrated in ways that are aesthetically pleasing and can even lead to innovation in design. Educators David Rose and Ann Meyer coined the term Universal Design for Learning in 1990, echoing these principles of Universal Design in architecture.

UDL is a fundamentally different way of looking at difference: accommodation relies on a notion of disability as abnormal, strange, or special in a negative way, while UDL relies on a notion of difference *as normal*, welcoming difference, communicating to every student that they are welcome. A UDL approach means building options for engagement and demonstration into instruction, just as designing a building with both a ramp and a staircase allows more people to enter the building and causes no hindrance to anyone. In a classroom designed around principles of UDL, three principles are activated: students are provided with multiple avenues into course content, multiple avenues to engage with course content, and multiple avenues to express their understanding of course content. This typically manifests itself as course content being presented in different ways, such as through lecture, visuals, demonstrations, and field trips; students being presented with different ways to engage with content in class, such as discussion, free-writing, hands-on activities, and role-playing; and students being given open-ended assignments, such as having the option to demonstrate their understanding through writing a paper, having a conversation with the professor, doing a performance, or creating a work of visual art.

Significantly, UDL—like universal design in architecture—enhances experiences for people with disabilities *and for everyone else.* A growing body of research connects UDL to enhanced learning for all students (Benton-Borghi; Lopes-Murphy; McGuire-Schwartz and Arndt; Spooner et al.; Strobel et al.). Just as Universal Design in architecture enhances experiences for people with disabilities and for everyone else, UDL enhances experiences for all students. All students benefit when there are more options for engaging with material or for demonstrating mastery of concepts.

UDL has been studied extensively by education and K-12 researchers, but less attention has gone to applying UDL to college, and even less to integrating the principles in college writing instruction. The most extensive treatment of UDL in college writing instruction is Patricia Dunn's innovative *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing*—although, interestingly, Dunn never uses the term UDL. Dunn argues that composition classes should move beyond relying on writing as the best way to teach writing, urging us to explore ways to engage students in visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities to help them grow as writers. She argues that "those who for whatever reason are not 'good writers' should be expected to call upon other strengths" (1). She highlights what she terms a "pedagogical injustice": "throughout most of the education system ... students are forced to use linguisto-centric tools to perform virtually all intellectual tasks" (8). She describes strategies for engaging students in writing tasks that involve manipulating cards, drawing images, talking with peers, and more. As brilliant as Dunn's book is, it saddens me considerably every time I reference it and am reminded that it was published in 2001 and there has been little uptake of her ideas since then.

Difference in Writing Centers

Although writing center practitioners are starting to pay more attention to disability, there is still surprisingly little in the literature. Karen Rowan poignantly noted in 2015, "If our (lack of) scholarship and research about the ways that people with disabilities work in writing centers is any indication, then we have considerable room to improve" (176). I do want to acknowledge Matthew Kim's 2014 dissertation, which looks at using writing center practices to work with high school students with disabilities, and the *Praxis* 2015 special issue devoted to disability. The *Praxis* special issue features an exhaustive review of articles on writing centers and disability by Rebecca Day Babcock; she finds that the majority of these articles rely on anecdote rather than empirical research. She also finds that although attention deficit disorders are "the second most commonly reported disability among college students," not a single article reported on research on tutoring students with attention deficit disorders. These types of glaring holes in the research are ubiquitous.

Despite this apparent lack of attention specifically to disability, perhaps because writing centers do so often work with students who do not default to writing as a learning strategy, there has been some attention in the literature specific to UDL in writing centers. Several pieces stand out. Kiedaisch and Dinitz's "Changing Notions of Difference in the

Writing Center: The Possibilities of Universal Design" and Rinaldi's "Disability in the Writing Center: A New Approach (That's Not so New)" advocate for writing centers to adopt UDL, and Allison Hitt makes the argument for multiliteracy centers to adopt UDL. Bell's "Learning Center Pedagogy and UDL: An Environment of Change" looks at learning centers, including writing centers, as ripe for UDL. Bell points out that learning centers, such as writing centers, are "ideally suited" to UDL because of the one-on-one nature of the work, which permits tutors to gain "more intimate knowledge and awareness of each student's needs and processes" (28). Bell further highlights the agency writing center work allows for students—and echoes the sentiments of Kiedaisch and Dinitz and Rinaldi:

> Rather than practitioners controlling the students' learning center experiences, they instead carefully respond to the students' needs and follow the students' lead, rather than the other way around. Students can determine the pace, the content, the structure, the tools, the activities, the goals, and the level of support. (30)

As Bell makes clear, empowering students to be active participants in designing their learning experiences is something most writing center practice already does. Making the leap to deliberate practice of UDL is a logical next step.

Our Practice

In this section, I discuss how UDL and an expanded notion of inclusivity have impacted several aspects of the MSU Denver Writing Center. The principles of UDL have broadly underpinned practices in the MSU Denver Writing Center for years. Early in my tenure as director, I introduced myself to the director of our disability services center and began developing a relationship with that office. For the past ten years, an associate director of the disability services center has been a guest speaker in the tutor training class, which helps establish for tutors that the disability services center is a collaborator with the Writing Center. Additionally, all tutors sit down once a year for a one-on-one or small group training with a disability services center employee focused on integrating adaptive technology into sessions. More recently, the Writing Center opened a satellite location inside the disability services center. Any student can have an appointment in that satellite, but its physical location inside the disability services center sends a clear message to students with disabilities that the Writing Center welcomes them. Finally, in the past year, I started working with the disability services center director to identify potential tutors from the students registered with the disability services center, as I discuss below.

Our efforts toward inclusivity took a significant step forward in spring 2016, when I asked my advisory board to conduct an inclusivity audit of the Writing Center. You'll see that I refer to the inclusivity audit several times below. The board has 12 members and includes faculty from departments that assign significant amounts of writing, students and adjunct instructors from our first-year writing courses, and a staff member from the center for disability support. Here are the instructions I gave them for the inclusivity audit:

- I want each of you to do an Inclusivity Audit of the Writing Center in which you examine barriers to inclusivity in the physical and web spaces.

- I want the Writing Center physical space and web space to say to every MSU Denver student, "Welcome, we're glad you're here! We were expecting you." The University's Diversity Associate highlighted for me one specific way the Writing Center might *not* be saying that to African-American students; he explained that in African-American culture, people often prefer to get help in a space more private than the Writing Center's current space allows.

- I would like to identify other possible barriers to making students feel invited and included in the Writing Center. I would like each of you to visit the Writing Center space (KC 415) and website and notice any cues that indicate to you that perhaps we weren't expecting *you*. Take into account any and all markers you identify with, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age, and anything else that is significant to you.

Because the board members looked at the Writing Center from perspectives shaped by different disciplines, roles at the university, levels of (dis)ability, as well as identity markers, their responses varied widely and focused on different aspects of the Writing Center. After each individual conducted their audit, the entire board met to discuss the audits.

Tutor hiring

Before conducting the inclusivity audit, I hired only English majors as peer tutors. The peer tutor job was listed on the

HR website along with other student campus positions, and frankly, enough people applied for and accepted the position each year that I felt that system was "working." In other words, I had not thought critically about how my hiring practice impacted the inclusivity of the Writing Center. When we met to discuss the inclusivity audit, however, the subject of hiring immediately came up. One person mentioned that she wanted to see tutors who reflect the races, ethnicities, and languages of the students coming in, and the member from the disability services center chimed in that she didn't notice any tutors or staff with visible disabilities. When I heard these concerns, I thought of the multiple studies that indicate that students who are exposed to a diverse peer group benefit both academically and socially, and their critical thinking skills and self-confidence improve (Antonio et al.; Laird; Pascarella, et al.; Williams, et al.). For these reasons, I have since made an intentional effort to hire tutors with disabilities.

In moving forward with this commitment, I noticed that the typical pool of applicants for tutoring positions lacked diversity and did not, in fact, reflect the diversity of the university's student population. I shared the existing job posting with a focus group of students and asked them who they thought the job description included or excluded and how I could make the posting more inviting to a diverse applicant pool. The group suggested eliminating the requirement that students be English majors, changing the phrase "Spanish-speakers welcome" to "bilingual and non-native English speakers welcome," and changing the emphasis of the email I send to faculty inviting nominations of potential tutors to characteristics of good tutors rather than writing skills. These were all helpful suggestions that I immediately implemented, but the group initially had no suggestions for how to invite applicants with disabilities. Through further discussion, we came to the idea of asking the disabilities services staff specifically to nominate potential tutors and then sending personal email invitations to the nominees to apply. This strategy was immediately successful and resulted in two new hires.

Eliminating the requirement that tutors be English majors and shifting the emphasis in nomination solicitations to the qualities of good tutors also had immediate diversifying effects on the applicant pool. Instead of asking for nominations of "good writers," I asked for names of students who were collaborative, empathic, encouraging, able to work with people different from them, articulate, with good listening skills and a growth mindset. The resulting group of new hires included students majoring in journalism, political science, nutrition, computer science, and psychology, as well as some English majors. Changing who I hire necessitated changing how I train tutors. Previously, tutors had to take a 3-credit hour upper-division course that counted toward an English major. Once I committed to hiring non-English majors, I realized I could not require non-English majors to take a 3-credit upper-division English course. This resulted in me developing a 1-credit hour upper-division English course with no prerequisites and hiring an assistant director to develop and coordinate a mentoring program for new tutors. The assistant director position was made possible by funding first from the English department and then from the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, signifying the commitment the University has to diversity.

As I worked to diversify the staff, I deliberately created an environment in which we talk about identity, difference, and inclusion. In a survey conducted by Valles, Babcock, and Jackson, only 3.2% of writing center directors identified themselves as having a disability, strikingly lower than the number of people in the population at large who identify as having a disability (cited in Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels). In order to normalize difference, I have made my disability very public—for example, mentioning it in my email signature, referencing it in staff meetings, and posting regularly on social media about my frequent mishaps related to poorly designed signage—and this seems to have encouraged an environment in which people feel comfortable disclosing their own disabilities. Over 20% of my current staff has publically disclosed a disability in a staff meeting.

Tutoring

In discussing the inclusivity audit, one board member observed that, "Students have to answer so many questions just to make an appointment! Name, ID number, major, course, kind of writing, kind of help, veteran status, home language, race, how they heard about the Writing Center. It's overwhelming." Hearing that made me understand that a student could feel like even getting registered with the Writing Center is a barrier to getting tutoring. I was able to move most of the questions to the tutor's client report form, removing the burden from the student. For example, the course and kind of writing are generally discussed in agenda-setting, so there is no need to have that information ahead of time, and because it is communicated to the tutor, the tutor can easily include it in the post-session report.

After I shared with my research assistant, Lucas Dembicki, the revisions to the intake process, he worked with the disability services center to develop a more detailed intake form for students with disabilities who want to provide more information to a tutor before their session. That form resides on the disability services center website and if a student chooses to complete it, the form is automatically submitted to the Writing Center. Lucas designed the form to align with UDL rather than the accommodation model, prompting students to provide information about how they learn best.

Honoring students as the ultimate authorities on themselves, tutor training prepares tutors to work with students in multiple modalities. In both the three-credit hour and one-hour training courses, tutors read Dunn's *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* and discuss and practice using strategies that appeal to visual, kinesthetic, and audio learning modalities. All tutors are expected to be able to work with students using the student's preferred learning modality. This means a tutor must be able to, for example, help a student brainstorm using visual strategies, such as diagramming or mapping on a white board; auditory strategies, such as debating or discussing; and kinesthetic strategies, such as building a model using Legos.

Moving beyond disability to inclusivity, tutors are trained to respect linguistic diversity and empower students to make informed rhetorical choices. Tutors are trained, for example, to not use terms like "nonstandard English," which implies that some Englishes are superior to others. Tutors read work by Vershawn Ashanti Young, including "Should Writers Use They Own English?," and discuss in depth the NCTE's statement on students' right to their own language. Further, tutor training emphasizes that writing center practices are not immune to institutionalized racism and work to actively push back against institutionalized racism. Tutors read and discuss work in Greenfield and Rowan's *Writing Centers and the New Racism* and excerpts from Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists.*

Remodel/space design

After my own experience with sciatica and a tutor's back surgery, I had added two bar-height tables with stools that made it possible to tutor while standing. This in in line with Diana Bell's suggestion that a space designed with UDL in mind should include "tables of various sizes, shapes, and heights in order to accommodate all students and pedagogy that encourages both individual, one-to-one, and small group interaction" (28).

The inclusivity audit generated a surprising amount of conversation about the Writing Center's space. I had been aware that noise during busy times was an issue and had arranged for tutors to be able to move sessions to the English department's conference room when a quiet space was needed and the conference room wasn't being used. However, I was unaware of other serious space issues. The audit brought my attention to ways the space of the Writing Center was disabling students.

Several board members mentioned problems with the entrance to the Writing Center. The Writing Center is a long rectangle, and there were two entrances facing each other on one end of the rectangle, with a reception desk oriented toward a short end of the rectangle, equidistant between the two entrances. When the space was originally designed, the architect suggested this arrangement so that students could easily enter from either hallway on the floor. However, as board members pointed out, this meant that every single person who entered through either door could reasonably wonder if they had come in through the wrong door. In fact, one student board member said, "Before I was on this board, I tried to go to the Writing Center but when I went in and saw the receptionist looking in another direction, I thought I had done it wrong and left in embarrassment." Another board member pointed out that a client in a wheelchair wouldn't be able to tell if someone was sitting behind the tall reception desk, highlighting the importance of sightlines (Yuknis and Bernstein 9).

With generous financial support, again from the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, the Writing Center space was remodeled in January 2017 to remove one entrance and create a door from the Writing Center directly into the English department's conference room, which, conveniently, share a wall. We also received funding to replace the high reception desk with one at a traditional desk height.

As I said, I was aware of noise being an issue at times, but a comment from another board member who had previously been a tutor in the Writing Center brought the gravity of the situation to my attention; she said, "As a brain injury survivor, I sometimes become overwhelmed by background noise. It's particularly difficult if I am in a session myself, for my brain has trouble differentiating and processing background noise versus what the writer I am working with is saying." In addition to adding the door to the English department's conference room, we purchased sound-absorbing ceiling tiles to mitigate the noise.

Marketing

As I mentioned earlier, the Writing Center conducts hundreds of class orientations each semester in which a tutor gives an overview of the Writing Center and its services. Certainly, having a more diverse staff of tutors to do these orientations sends a powerful message across campus that difference is normal in the Writing Center. Tutors are trained to talk in orientations about writing processes, plural, rather than "the writing process," and to acknowledge that depending on the student, how they work best, and what they are working on, one tutorial can look very different from another. Regardless of the kind of class or what the students in the class look like, tutors mention in orientations that all tutors are trained to work with adaptive software.

We also recently changed our slogan from "get it in writing" to "welcome all writers." The new slogan appears on our marketing material in English as well as a variety of other languages, aiming to echo the yard signs that popped up in the wake of the 2016 Presidential election that proclaimed a welcoming message to immigrant neighbors in a variety of languages. Our goal was to convey a similar sense of acceptance and inclusivity.

Next on the Horizon

Post-session satisfaction surveys indicate that students who visit the MSU Denver Writing Center are satisfied, but I want more data about who feels included in the space, why, and what barriers to inclusivity exist. Through an anonymous climate survey to be deployed in Fall 2017, I hope to learn how people of different gender and racial identities, age groups, and degrees of able-bodiedness feel about the Writing Center. Results will be discussed with the advisory board and student focus groups before responses are developed.

Recommendations

For WPAs considering launching an inclusivity initiative, I have four recommendations that grow out of my experience:

1. Consider how your hiring practices imply to students what you think a "good writer" looks/sounds like. Six years ago, my tutoring staff was made up entirely of English majors and people with advanced degrees in English. They mostly appeared to be white and able-bodied, and they were all native speakers of English. Anyone glancing around the Writing Center would have been justified in jumping to the conclusion that the Writing Center was a place of privilege. If your application pool lacks diversity, consider what your job posting might be implicitly communicating to potential applicants about who is welcome to apply.

2. Cultivate an ethic of imperfection, a term I have borrowed from Kelly Webster, director of the writing center at the University of Montana. An ethic of imperfection means striving for growth rather than perfection and acknowledging that there often isn't a "right" or "correct" way of doing something. Aiming for perfection assumes that something can be finished, and inclusivity work is never finished. Cultivating an ethic of imperfection means allowing yourself and others to make mistakes, own them, and learn from them. As director, I have to model this vulnerability and acknowledge when I bring my own implicit biases and able-ist assumptions to the Writing Center. For example, last semester several tutors complained to me about a regular client who refused to make eye contact but kept coming in for appointments. My first assumption was that the student wanted the tutors to do the work for her; however, after observing a tutor working with the student, I realized that quite possibly the student was on the autism spectrum. In debriefing with the tutors who had initially complained, I confessed my own able-ist assumptions and together we brainstormed ways to work with the student.

I know the writing center staff has adopted an ethic of imperfection when I overhear tutors talking to each other about sessions, saying things like, "The student didn't react the way I expected to the strategies I used," or "My assumptions were challenged," or "The strategy didn't have the impact I anticipated." In these snippets, I hear proof that the tutors understand that difference isn't about someone being deficient, but rather about diversity, and that they are comfortable acknowledging their own able-ist assumptions and moving forward.

3. Build in mechanisms for regularly getting other perspectives about your practices, space, marketing, etc. Find ways to learn about your writing center from an outsider's perspective. Conduct an inclusivity audit like I did, or adopt a user-centered approach, such as the one described by Brizee et al. They explain how a revision of the Purdue OWL for accessibility was guided by a user-centered approach and participatory design, which put the emphasis on the people using the website and "involving users and their feedback in the production process" (343). They suggest "engaging in conversations with a broad range of writing center users might help administrators and tutors 'listen' to a population that is normally underrepresented in staff meetings" (357). The inclusivity audit that I had my advisory board members do brought issues to my attention that I had not noticed and I doubt I would have noticed them. The traffic pattern at the front desk, for example, had been right in front of me *for years* and I had been unaware that it was an issue.

4. Partner with your disability services center. I had consulted often with our disability services center, but I realize now that partnering is different from and deeper than consulting. When I issued my invitation to the director to appoint a member of his staff to the Advisory Board and to make tutor recommendations, I signaled

that I wanted more than simply information or even solutions to problems. This helped him understand that I wanted our relationship to be reciprocal, which led to the establishment of the satellite location inside the disability services center.

Conclusion: Retrofitting versus Universal Design

The accommodation model has become the default way of dealing with disability and difference in higher education. While a thoughtful accommodation can allow for accessibility, it is the equivalent of retrofitting an existing building with a ramp to allow alternative ways to enter the building; the ramp is often awkwardly placed, perhaps on the side or back of the building, or constructed out of materials different from that of the original building, making it an eyesore or calling attention to it in negative ways. Jay Dolmage points out that retrofitting instructional materials and strategies is a "react[ion] to diversity" rather than a sign of respect for difference (21), just as the hastily appended ramp on an existing building might be.

Anyone looking to make an existing writing center more inclusive will have to do some retrofitting at the beginning because the building, to go back to the architecture metaphor, has already been built and ramps need to be added. However, as new programs and initiative are created, they can be developed with UDL in mind, avoiding the problems associated with retrofitting. Another way to avoid retrofitting is to end one practice and replace it with a completely new one, as I did when I pulled the existing job posting for tutors and replaced it with a brand new one, rather than trying to adjust what is already in place.

If I had the luxury of starting over, there are a few key things I would do differently. First, I would hire tutors from any major or minor rather than focusing on students affiliated with the English program. Developing a tutoring staff from the ground up that was hired for their collaboration and listening skills rather than for their knowledge of writing would have allowed me to avoid a lengthy transition period in which the Writing Center was basically rebranding itself, both internally and externally. During the time that the tutoring staff was dominated by English majors and minors, it was much more common to hear both tutors and faculty across the university talk about the Writing Center as a place that helps students "fix" their writing. Although tutor training always pushed back against that idea, faculty across campus would say things to me like, "Your tutors are all English majors, right? So they can help my students with proper English." Once I shifted to hiring tutors from other programs, it became easier for me to reframe such questions with responses like, "Actually, our tutors are from across the disciplines, so they can help students with all aspects of their writing," moving the conversation toward what makes good *writing* rather than what is "proper" or not.

The other thing I would do significantly differently if I could start over would be to embrace the idea of satellite locations. I spent several years making pleas for a bigger writing center space. I realize now that having satellite locations across campus offers many advantages over a larger writing center space. Most importantly, having a satellite in the disability services center nurtures the relationship between the writing center and the disability services center. Before we had our satellite in the disability services center, I knew all the staff there, but my tutors did not; similarly, the staff there knew me but not my tutors. Having a satellite in their office has allowed my staff to feel like they know the disability services staff and can ask for feedback about what they are doing. The disability services staff is more familiar with what writing tutoring can look like and can speak about it to students with more detail and familiarity now.

Implementing UDL in the MSU Denver Writing Center has made tutors more responsive, strengthened our relationship with the disability services office, and opened doors for more productive conversations with faculty from across campus about writing instruction and processes. I encourage other WPAs to consider ways their programs might benefit from UDL.

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