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When Chat and Email are not Enough: Developing Real-Time, Interactive Online Writing Center Tutorials

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WHEN CHAT AND EMAIL ARE NOT ENOUGH: DEVELOPING REAL-TIME,
INTERACTIVE ONLINE WRITING CENTER TUTORIALS

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of the Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

As new technologies have become available to facilitate online writing tutorials, university Writing Centers have begun to use these technologies to better serve online students. WPAs now face new difficulties serving remote student and faculty populations, whose native language may not be English, through interactive online tutorials across international borders. Determining the best practices and technologies for real-time, interactive tutorials and implementing these practices are issues that have not been given much attention in recent scholarship, but are vital to best serve growing international campuses.

There are a few key concerns with ESOL tutoring that must be addressed when considering the implementation of real-time, interactive online tutoring; for example, comprehension of oral English becomes a major problem during online sessions. However with the help of truly integrated technologies students can not only see and hear the tutor, but these technologies also allow a platform for written communication and modeling. Other very real concerns with real-time, interactive online tutorials are fiscal hardships of universities and the faculty and tutor training with the new technologies. By utilizing low-cost, sometimes free, online tutoring platforms, universities can achieve a truly interactive, revenue neutral OWL. Furthermore, despite the time required to train faculty and tutors, the training offers an opportunity for growth in Writing Center theory and online pedagogy.

The current study examines the feasibility of developing revenue neutral online writing tutorials for international students studying at international branch campuses. Preliminary data shows that less than half of US universities hosting international branch

campuses currently coordinate with or offer online tutoring to the students on these campuses. With the mounting pressure to ensure quality across international borders, it is clear that there is a growing population of under-served students on international campuses. Writing Center Directors and WPAs must use the technologies available and train culturally sensitive tutors to serve these students.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Over the past few decades, American higher education has been quickly spreading across international borders. With the movement, has come mounting criticism about quality assurance, and US Writing Centers play a vital role in ensuring that all graduates from American universities, whether domestic or in other countries, meet the standards in written proficiency that are established by accreditation agencies and the universities. Although the number of international branch campuses is not yet statistically significant, the development of real-time, interactive online writing lab (OWL) tutorials will benefit the quickly growing international student population greatly.

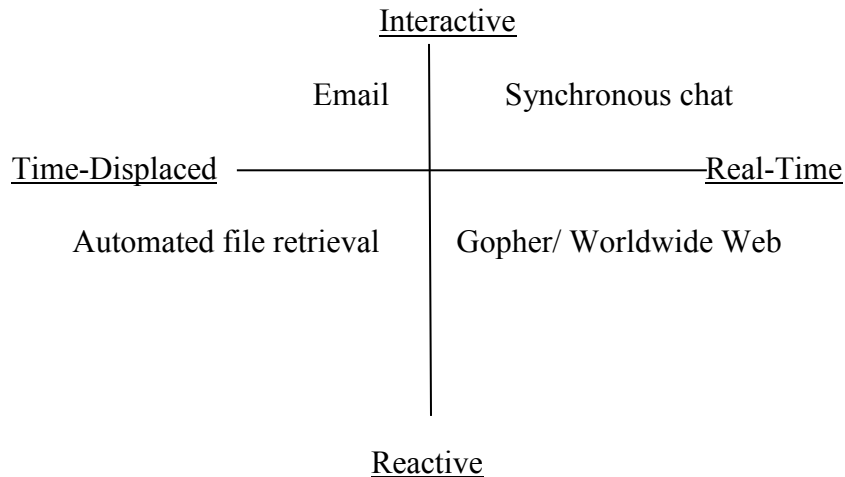
Literature Review

OWL Literature

One of the earliest pieces of scholarship on OWLs, “Online Writing Labs (OWLs): A Taxonomy of Options and Issues,” was published in 1995 by Muriel Harris and Michael Pamberton. Harris and Pamberton explore the contemporary practices and technologies being used by newly developing OWLs, including those at their own institutions.¹ In the study, Harris and Pamberton identify four types of online writing center sessions and classify them according to the level of tutor/student interaction and time displacement (146). Using the following chart Harris and Pamberton outline the four basic mediums of computer-based writing center sessions²:

¹ At the time of publication Muriel Harris was teaching at Purdue University, and Michael Pamberton was at the University of Illinois.

² Although other terms may be used to describe the various types of online interaction, I chose to use Harris and Pamberton’s system of classification for the purpose of clarity and simplicity.



(Harris and Pamberton 147)

Harris and Pamberton do not make value judgments on any of the forms presented in their research; instead, they simply outline the potential methods of online tutoring. As can be plainly seen, email tutoring, currently the most popular method of online tutoring, is classified as “interactive/time-displaced,” meaning that the student and the tutor interact on some level but the interaction is not immediate. Chat sessions, on the other hand, are classified as “interactive/real-time.” The distinction is that during a chat session students and tutors are able to respond to one another immediately and receive answers in real-time.

Harris and Pamberton clearly identified all of the viable options for online writing center sessions for the past two decades, and in 1997 Sara Kimball identified the downfalls of email-mediated tutoring. Kimball claims that the lack of face-to-face interaction and dialogue with students makes it nearly impossible to read the student’s intentions, saying, “The lack of information about participants’ attitudes and intentions makes a difference in a medium that seems like conversation. . . . [P]articipants in

interactions may harbor assumptions from their experience as speakers about how their communication is likely to be interpreted” (35). In Kimball’s view, tutoring is greatly hindered by the facelessness of email-mediated sessions. If the tutor cannot speak to the student about his or her intentions or attitudes, the tutor cannot hope to make suggestions that maintain the student’s intended meaning.

In response to the concerns raised by Kimball, Dana Anderson published a case study of twenty-nine OWLs in 2002, identifying the best practices of the most successful OWLs. According to the results of Anderson’s study, successful OWLs using email to conduct sessions were clear about services offered, the types of feedback to expect, and who could receive help on the OWLs email submission interface (76-78). Moreover, the success of email sessions is largely dependent upon the investment of tutors and students, and the expectations of each party. Anderson concludes that the best practices of email sessions are to gather general information about the students, and allow the tutor to function as the audience of the paper, remarking on the clarity, cohesion, and flow of the student’s writing (81-82).

Both Kimball and Anderson have discussed the drawbacks and functions of email-mediated tutoring and agree that to some extent, email tutoring limits the functions of tutors and therefore, the feedback that students can hope to receive during these sessions. This study, however, explores newly available options for online tutoring, such as video chat, and file- and screen-sharing that have now entered the market and provide OWLs the opportunity to conduct “face-to-face” sessions online, which will prove useful in offering ESOL students on international campuses more comprehensive OWL support.

*ESOL Literature*³

Before Harris and Pamberton outlined the options for online writing center tutorials in 1995, Judith Powers discussed the changes that had to be made to accommodate the rising numbers of ESOL students in university writing centers. In her 1993 article “Rethinking Writing Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer,” Powers asserts that ESOL writers bring an entirely new set of issues to be addressed in the writing center. Powers questions the age-old rule of nondirective, non-prescriptive writing tutoring. According to Powers, the ESOL writer needs more direct attention than a native-speaker, and writing center tutors should be aware that the need for direct feedback is simply a result of a lack of language competency (30-31), and these students will therefore ask direct questions and tutors should offer direct answers to build the students’ confidence when composing in English.

In answer to Powers, Jane Corgie, Kim Strain, and Sharon Lorinskas assert that the expectation of directive feedback from tutors creates an editing environment; an environment in which the tutor feels pressure to edit rather than teach (7). In order to avoid this editing trap, Corgie, Strain, and Lorinskas suggest that tutors are encouraged to use learning dictionaries, minimal marking, error logs, and self-editing checklists to promote the students’ self-editing practices.

By 2000, OWLs had been rapidly increasing in numbers and writing center tutors were more frequently faced with the complications of tutoring ESOL students online. Jennifer Ritter writes from the perspective of a graduate student and writing center tutor, saying that the difficulties of ESOL tutoring are not necessarily the fact that ESOL

³ Although multiple acronyms are used for second-language students, such as ESL, ESOL, ELL, and LEP (limited English proficiency), this study will use *ESOL* throughout for purposes of simplicity and consistency.

student need more sentence-level attention as Powers suggests. Ritter instead insists that successful ESOL tutoring relies on the tutors' ability to negotiate the needs of the student as they identify errors in writing, including how errors will be identified and how the tutor and student will address the issues (105). Ritter also touches on the difficulties of tutoring ESOL students online but she maintains that it is possible to model correctness for ESOL students online: "When I notice global errors in an ESL writer's paper, I first respond with my questions about what I think the writer intended to say. Then, I model correctness" (107). Clearly, Ritter has negotiated the limitations of online tutoring, but she does also recognize that online tutoring does not allow for real-time negotiations as a session progresses (107).

Ritter acknowledges the shortcomings of online tutoring that Zhang, Perris, and Yeung explore in their 2005 research on Japanese students' perceptions of online tutoring. Zhang, Perris, and Yeung focused on students attending the Open University of Hong Kong in Japan and using the online tutoring services offered by the host campus in the UK. The findings of the research indicate that only 43% of students were satisfied with the teaching strategies tutors used during online sessions (796). Moreover, 48% of students said they would like more interaction during online sessions and 50% said they would benefit from more training in how to communicate online (797). The results to the survey show that students participating in online tutoring in Hong Kong feel that the tutors and the students could benefit from more training on how to communicate effectively online, and that they would like more interaction during the online tutoring process.

Taken as a whole, the OWL literature and ESOL tutoring literature point to a few trends in tutoring ESOL students online. ESOL students need tutors to take a more directive approach to teaching, tutors need to avoid playing the role of editor during online sessions, and current online tutoring practices are not comprehensive enough to offer ESOL students the interactive, in-depth sessions needed to excel. With the added distance and language barrier between tutor and tutee when online tutoring occurs across international borders, the downfalls of traditional online tutoring platforms becomes quite obvious, yet there may be a way to bring the benefits of face-to-face tutoring to an online setting.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to identify and discuss the need and the means to develop international OWLs. In Chapter Two, the number of US hosted international branch campuses and the number of students on these campuses is offered. According to the US Department of Education as of 2010, there were 2,226 not-for-profit 4-year institutions in the US. Of these not-for-profit schools, 34 schools host 68 separate international branch campuses in 29 countries around the world, with conservative enrollment estimates in the tens of thousands.

Chapter Three then discusses trends in the host institution's writing centers awareness and involvement with branch campuses shown by the initial data gathered from writing center directors at universities hosting international branch campuses. Of the 34 not-for-profit schools, I was able to locate the contact information for the Writing Center Directors of 25. As of today, I have received 15 response to my anonymous survey, which indicate that the prevailing trends are that while the hosts institutions'

writing centers are split almost equally in their awareness of writing centers on international campuses, only about a quarter of host campus writing centers actively coordinate with their international counterpart. Likewise, of the responding host campuses only a little more than half offer online writing tutorials for students studying at international branch campuses; moreover, the most commonly used medium for these online tutorials is email, with synchronous chat coming in as a close second.

Chapter Four reviews a number of newly developed online technologies that lend themselves nicely to the development of real-time, interactive online tutorials across international borders. Online collaboration technologies allow for face-to-face discussion between tutor and student via webcam and video chat. Video chat programs are aided by file and screen sharing capabilities, which enable both parties to see all of the same information and discuss any needed corrections, as they are being made in real-time. Moreover, the recoding, online file storage, and online scheduling features offered by individual companies, on specific products, creates opportunities for the continued development of OWL theory and practice.

Before addressing the opportunities created by online collaborative technologies, it is important to note the potential difficulties with using these technologies. Chapter Five identifies and addresses these issues. As with any internet based services, there is the possibility of the online sessions being interrupted by slow internet connections or lost signals. Although these issues may be unavoidable, with some patience and understanding from tutors and students these problems can be overcome by simply rebooting and trying to reconnect.

Aside from technical failures, tutoring ESOL students in a face-to-face environment comes with unique difficulties in oral comprehension from both parties, and these hardships with oral comprehension are only magnified in an online environment. Speaking into a microphone can obscure pronunciation, but the text chat functions of the programs allow the tutor and student to clarify meaning through writing if comprehension issues cannot be resolved in any other manner. Cultural differences will also become magnified during online sessions. Chinese students, for example, are taught in their early educations that learning is not necessarily a collaborative process and because of this mind set they tend to be less participatory during tutoring sessions. During a face-to-face session the tutor can overcome this by simply handing the student the pencil and backing away from the desk slightly. During an online session, there are no physical ways to overcome a non-participatory student. The best solution for this will occur through training and trial and error.

Chapter Six is then divided into two major sections: an analysis of how online collaborative technologies work within the framework of current writing center theory and practice, and the recruitment and training implications of conducting web-mediated face-to-face tutoring sessions across international borders. In terms of theory and practice, conducting OWL sessions using online collaborative technologies meet the requirements of minimalistic tutoring practices, without creating an environment in which the tutor quickly becomes an editor. The face-to-face format of video chat also eases the relationship building process between tutor and tutee by humanizing online contact. The second section of Chapter Six outlines the recruitment and training implications of the use of online collaborative technologies for OWL services. Recruiting

the appropriate students to become tutors is an important aspect of successful writing centers, and the types of students recruited for international sessions warrant discussion. An ideal international tutor should speak the language of their students' country. The ability to speak the students' native language is very helpful in facilitating discussion about intended meaning and problematic translations. The recruitment process for international tutors also needs to be refocused, in that more emphasis should be put on the potential tutors' aptitude for customer service and patience rather than strictly on written proficiency. Once the tutors are in place, training international tutors also needs to be modified, focusing more on cultural differences, student expectations, and the contrastive rhetoric of individual nations.

After an examination of the limitations and future research implications of the study, Chapter Seven makes recommendations to writing center directors interested in offering comprehensive online tutoring to students across international borders. First and foremost, in order to deal with magnified cultural differences during online sessions, Writing Center Directors may hire online tutors and designate them a particular country. That tutor can then be trained in the culture and education practices of that country and taught techniques to help the students fully engage and take ownership of their work. Likewise, tutors must be trained in the contrastive rhetoric of the particular nationality that they will be working with; thus, the tutor will be familiar with the culturally acceptable writing style and have the tools to explain to the student clearly how the organization of the paper should be changed to meet Western standards. Therefore, international tutors must be trained and expected to put in a slightly more work in order to teach the student when oral comprehension may be hindered by the use of

microphones. The tutor must use all of the technologies available to them to actively model, reiterate, and share resources with the student, just as they would in a face-to-face session.

Conclusion

The continuing trend of the internationalization of US universities has slowed only slightly in the declining global economy, and writing center directors on these growing campuses must, therefore, seek new ways to promote the success of students through offering online writing tutoring. International OWLs will promote cultural sensitivity, create globally minded tutors and students, and open new areas of study in OWL theory and practice; moreover, the development of international OWLs can be achieved at little to no cost to the host university. In spite of the potential drawbacks and difficulties with getting an international OWL running successfully, the benefits to the students cannot be ignored as the number of students enrolled at US branch campuses continues to rise.

Chapter Two: International Branch Campuses

US universities have been major players in the growing trend of internationalization; not only are administrators focusing on recruiting international students to attend US universities, but colleges are also opening their doors across international borders to offer US accredited degrees, creating a rise in the number of international branch campuses.⁴ Not much thought has been given to the academic support services offered to students on international branch campuses; however, these students are in fact ESOL students, in most cases, and require the additional support services, such as Writing Centers, offered on US campuses. Students attending branch campuses are expected to take classes, complete assignments, and compose in English, and upon completion of degree requirements, the students are awarded US accredited degrees.

What is an international branch campus?

For the purposes of this study, “host university” will refer to the US native university, and “branch campus” will refer to the host university’s international outposts.

International branch campuses differ from international partner campuses. An international partnership is an agreement between two universities that entails the two working together to meet some common goal. The American Council of Education (ACE) outlines the types of partnerships that can be made between campuses in the fourth edition of *International Partnerships: Guidelines for Colleges and Universities* (2008). ACE offers an explanation of four different types of partnerships: University partnerships, friendship and cooperation partnerships, broad institutional partnerships,

⁴ International branch campuses differ from international partner campuses in that a branch campus carries the name and accreditation of the US host campus.

and program specific partnerships (ACE). Each partnership comes with different arrangements and levels of cooperation. For instance, a broad institutional partnership will allow for the exchange of faculty and students to and from both partners; whereas, a program specific partnership, such as the aerospace program partnership between New Mexico State University and the Autonomous University of Chihuahua, Mexico, allows students to earn a dual degree in one specific program.

In comparison to university partnerships, international branch campuses typically award students degrees from the host university; that is, students earn US accredited degrees upon graduation. Since the emergence of “internationalization” two decades ago, US universities have been moving across international borders to offer education services in foreign countries. The extent of the host universities’ investment, participation, and branding of these branch campuses is one point of contention when attempting to determine which campuses do or do not count as branch campuses. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that in the 2012 report on international branch campuses released by the Observatory of Higher Education, the researchers had difficulties: “In attempting to hit a moving target, the report captures different forms of foreign educational outposts that don’t fit previous conceptualizations of an IBC [international branch campus], and places a rather diverse set of campuses under a single IBC label” (Lane and Kinser). Simply put, the degrees granted, nationality of instructors, and services offered at each international campus vary so widely that it is nearly impossible to plainly define which campuses qualify as branch campuses.

Due to the ever-changing nature of the definition of branch campuses, this study uses the term “branch campus” to refer to only those universities on foreign soils holding

the name of the host university and awarding degrees under the same accreditation as the host university. Factors considered in the report released by the Observatory of Higher Education, such as whether or not students are concurrently awarded natively accredited degrees, and if the instructors are American or native, are not considered.⁵ Instead, the number of current branch campuses is taken from the list compiled by Higher.org in November 2013.

International Branch Campus Statistics

According to the survey conducted by Higher.org in 2013, there are currently 233 international branch campuses around the world. Each of these campuses is housed across international borders, and the host university is housed in countries ranging from the United States to Malaysia. Of these 233 campuses, 78 are hosted by 36 US universities. The majority of these campuses are small, only serving a student body of between 100 and 3,000 students, yet even using a modest estimate this means that US universities could be educating tens of thousands of students across international borders.⁶

The thirty-six US host universities each made a deal with the local and or national governments of the countries in which the branch campuses reside. These agreements typically entail who will pay for the construction, maintenance, faculty, and student services. Ideally costs are split, but each branch campus has a different agreement between partners; thus, it is difficult to point to any one agreement and call it the

⁵ Due to the exorbitant cost of the OHE report, the understanding of the report's varying definition of branch campuses has been taken from responses to the report.

⁶ Because campus populations and contact information are not easily available for each branch campus, the numbers generated are based upon the numbers provided in public reports made easily accessible by a small number of universities.

“norm.”⁷ The success of International Branch campuses is not only dependent on the financial agreements made between partners, but also on the services offered to students, encouraging them to remain invested in the university and successfully complete degrees.

Given the complex nature of the definition of international branch campus, it is unclear when the first actual branch campus was established. US universities first began to branch out across national borders as early as the 1970s (Marcus 42); however, it would seem the earliest of these campuses were partnerships, not actual branch campuses. In short, US universities would align with foreign universities to offer support or program partnerships, but the students were not awarded US accredited degrees upon graduation. In the past two decades there has been much media and academic attention on the newly emerging branch campuses. Critics assert a host of problems from unfair agreements to lack of student support.

Criticism of International Branch Campuses

William Hunt asserts that international branch campuses lack uniformity in English language competency requirements. According to Hunt, “Overseas students attending private colleges are required to sit [for] approved English-language tests ... [while] students attending public institutions do not: this is left to the discretion of the universities” (24). Hunt is speaking of UK universities, but it is easy to imagine that the problem is not UK specific; for example, there are US universities that do not require TOEFL scores for international students applying to graduate programs, yet others put great importance on TOEFL scores. As a result of the varying language competency

⁷ Kevin Kinser and Jason E. Lane offer an analysis of the varying agreements and management of international campuses in “Managing the oversight of International Branch Campuses in Higher Education.” *Higher Education Management and Policy* 24.3 (2014).

requirements it may be difficult to tell if the students that will be admitted will bring with them an understanding of the English language.

Regardless of the language competency requirements, international branch campuses seem to uniformly agree on one thing: the students must compose in English. Currently, there exists little to no scholarship on whether or not it is appropriate or feasible to require international students attending US universities in their home nations to compose in English, but the issue is sure to be divided. On the one hand, the students must compose in English because they are receiving US accredited degrees, which imply a certain understanding and mastery of the English language and composition. On the other hand, who is to say that composing in English is somehow superior to composing in the students' native tongue? Furthermore, who should be working with the students to foster their understanding of Anglophone rhetoric?

In a recent conversation I had with a professor teaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on a branch campus, these questions were brought up, but it would seem there is not yet a simple answer:

... when we as English instructors value "native" English speakers above others, what kinds of messages are we sending our students? Many of our students have been learning English in school for a long time, and a number speak a meshed-up version of English and Arabic. Is my role as an instructor to support my students' multilingualism, to impose a new dialect (one of many versions of American English) upon them, some

combination of the two, or some other goal entirely? Is it necessary to have a native speaker to meet any or all of these goals?⁸

Clearly, many instructors working at international campuses are concerned about overstepping boundaries when teaching international students across international borders.

Whether or not tutors must possess native-English-level ability to foster the results desired on these campuses is a question in need of further investigation, and although there is undeniable value in having native speakers' opinions and help when composing in a secondary language, recent studies show that tutors' abilities to speak in the tutees native tongue is also valuable. At the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication the International University of Florida (IUF) presented its findings on this very matter. Some the tutors in IUF's writing center can speak two or more languages, and the recordings of the sessions with tutees clearly show that ESOL students who are having a difficult time expressing themselves in English were often able to express their ideas clearly in their native language. At such a point, the tutor could guide the students to the appropriate word and usage in English. For further discussion on FIU's multilingual writing center, see Chapter Six.

Other major points of criticism for international branch campuses include funding, administration, degree accreditation, staffing, and recruitment,⁹ and although each of these concerns warrants discussion and in-depth investigation, providing support services in composition for ESOL students on international campuses is a step in the direction of uniformity. Whether tutors are native speakers or ESOL students

⁸ At the instructor's request names and university names have been omitted.

⁹ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Times Higher Education Supplement* have featured an article on these subjects at least once a month since the early 1990s.

themselves, writing center sessions have proven to be invaluable in fostering students' abilities to express opinions clearly, concisely, and competently at the college level (North 84-85, and Powers 30).

Conclusion

International branch campuses are essentially still in their infancy, and as such, many questions remain as to what exactly constitutes a branch campus instead of a partnership, how the political particulars of these agreements should be carried out, and what the expectations of both universities and students should be when operating or studying across international borders. Be that as it may, it would appear that the requirement of composing in English remains consistent throughout; thus, universities operating campuses internationally cannot ignore the implications of this requirement.

Writing Center support has been offered to online students within the states since the early 1990s, and online support may be the most feasible option for branch campuses. However, the traditional avenues for online tutoring such as email may not be the best way to approach online tutoring, as discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, as shown in Chapter Four, developing an interactive, real-time, web-mediated platform for international students can be achieved with little to no added fiscal strain, and the pedagogical implications of such an online platform will usher Writing Center theory and practice into the now technology-mediated world of higher education.¹⁰

¹⁰ For an in-depth analysis of the pedagogical, practical, and theoretical implications, see Chapter Six.

Chapter Three: Writing Centers and OWLs

Each year as another university opens its doors in another country, writing centers play an important, yet surprisingly ignored, role in enhancing ESOL writing competencies and language fluency for students seeking US accredited degrees across international borders. As one instructor at a branch campus located in the UAE recently pointed out to me, it is often left to the handful of instructors that are native speakers on these international campuses to act as the writing center tutor and take on the brunt of not only their class load but also helping both ESOL students and faculty navigate English composition.¹¹ While a very small number of host universities have begun to offer tutoring services to the underserved populations on international branch campuses, the traditional OWL session practices and formats may not be inclusive enough to meet the needs of ESOL students.

OWL Theory and Practices

University writing centers began moving online in the 1990s, when the internet became widely accessible and online education was in its early stages of development. The then “experiment” with online education spurred writing center directors to begin exploring the ways in which they might serve these new online students. The idea of an online writing lab or OWL was that students could receive support and access the same reference materials online that they would have available to them on campus. Since the inception of OWLs, there has been much discussion about the best practices for tutor training and conducting online sessions.

¹¹ The instructor has given me permission to use our conversation; however, I was asked to de-identify all information including the instructors name, the university’s name, and the exact location of the university.

OWLs were developed over the course of the 1990s to better serve students who were not able to be present in the writing center during normal business hours, and students who attended the earliest online classes. As OWLs evolved, universities used various forms of online technologies to meet the needs of students. Although Harris and Pamberton do not seek to make judgments about each type of online session in their 1995 article, they do assert that the best OWL practices will be identified in individual writing centers as writing center directors modify, clarify, and account for online populations in the writing center's mission (155-56). Simply put, Harris and Pamberton discuss the available options and the strengths and weaknesses of each without making value judgments about the best practices for each form of media.

Harris and Pamberton may not have known that their article identified the OWL services that in less than ten years would become more necessary than ever. By 2002, the Sloane Consortium released its first annual report on the prevalence of online education, which showed that “over 1.6 million students took at least one online course in the fall of 2002” (Allen and Seamen “Seizing” 1). Clearly, the need for online writing center tutoring was there, and email had become the most popular computer-mediated online tutoring for OWLs. Also in 2002, Dana Anderson sought to identify the best practices of twenty-nine OWLs in “Interfacing Email Tutoring: Shaping an Emergent Literate Practice.” In the introduction to her study Anderson asserts

email environments that allow this [virtual] collaboration to take place represent a challenge to more than such pragmatic issues of writing center administration; these technological environments have come to challenge the very ‘idea’ of the writing center by challenging both the literate

practices and the underlying conceptions of literacy that our centers enact.

(72)

Clearly, Anderson saw the emergence of OWLs and online sessions as both a challenge and an opportunity to expand writing center theory and practice to encompass the rapidly changing educational environment.

After examining the importance and techniques of establishing a tutor-student relationship and identifying the issues the student would like addressed before the tutor opens the paper, Anderson concludes that email tutoring and OWL practices will change significantly as the online education environment changes, and with the assistance of initial probing questions, modifications to tutor training, and increasing both tutor and student computer literacies, OWLs will continue to grow and change to accommodate online education and provide adequate support to virtual students (83). However, the design and proper execution of online sessions must be the primary concern of writing center directors as they move online.¹²

Although emergent OWL theory did well to address the needs and options of domestic students, early scholarship on OWLs failed to address fully a quickly growing demographic of the online student population: ESOL students across international borders. In 2007 Wei-yuan Zhang, Kirk Perris, and Lesley Yeung recorded student perceptions and satisfaction with the online tutoring services offered at the Open University of Hong Kong. The researchers sampled 449 students taking online courses in both English and Japanese. The results showed that while 45% of these students agreed that tutors gave prompt responses to their concerns, and 46% said the online tutoring was

¹² For other major discussion on online writing centers, see Andrews 9-10, Kimball 30-49, and Harris, J. 664-68.

well organized and structured, only 35% of the students agreed that tutors encouraged online dialogue, and 48% of students said they felt they would benefit from an increase in online interactions with tutors (797). While the survey shows that the students were responding well to the overall concept and practices of online tutoring, it is clear that the students also felt that they would benefit greatly from a more interactive tutoring environment.

Zhang, Perris, and Yeung's study is among the first to identify international ESOL students' perception of online tutoring, and by 2007 there were a growing number of international campuses serving thousands of students across the globe. Interestingly, though, there was no dramatic increase in writing center scholarship that directly addressed the needs of students on international branch campuses. As if the criticism claiming that students on international branch campuses are in danger of being neglected by host universities is correct, writing center theory and practice have been slow to take up the notion of offering online writing tutoring to ESOL students on international branch campuses.

Zheng, Perris, and Yeung's research looks at ESOL students' perceptions of OWL sessions; however, as of yet, there exists no empirical data regarding the prevalence of ESOL students on international branch campuses and the services offered to them. The frequency that writing center support is offered to these students must be identified and analyzed in terms of services offered, computer-based media used to provide services, and the active participation of host writing centers in supplying these services.

OWL Services offered by US Host Campuses

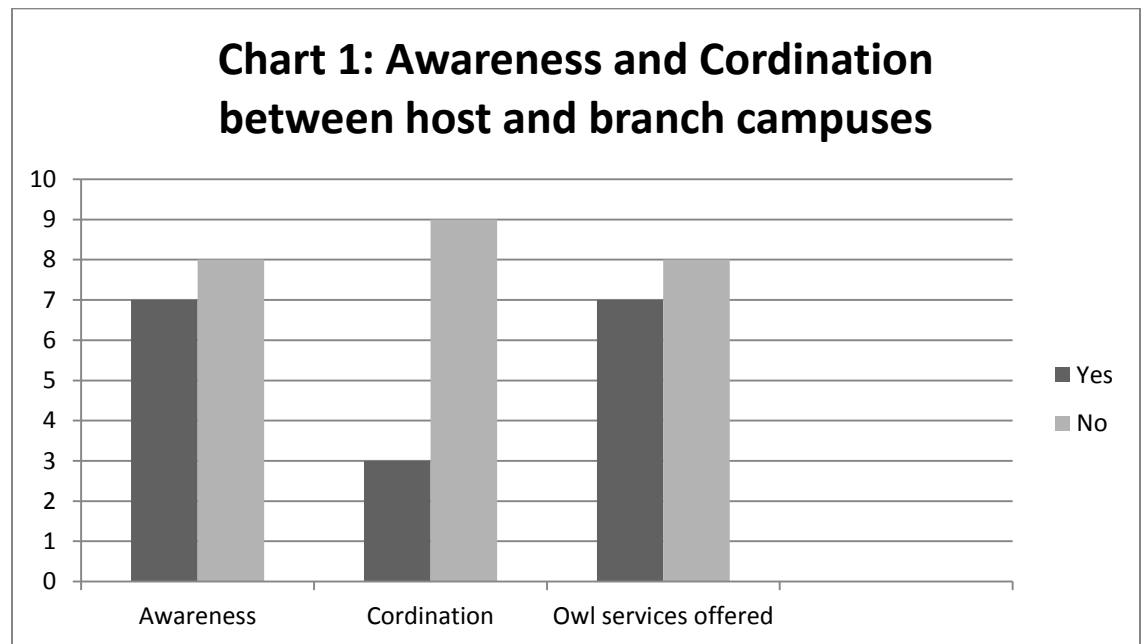
As discussed in Chapter Two, of the 2,790 4-year colleges and universities in the US during the 2009-2010 academic year, 2,226 are either public or private not-for-profit institutions. Furthermore, of the 2,226 public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities counted by the US Department of Education, 1,153 had registered writing center facilities with the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) by February 14, 2014.¹³ Meaning only 52 percent of US universities have registered a Writing Center with the IWCA, and although there is the possibility that universities have simply not registered with the IWCA, the data available would seem to indicate that only slightly over half of four-year, public or private not-for-profit postsecondary institutions have writing center facilities readily available for student use.¹⁴ In addition to a directory of writing center facilities, the IWCA also offers a list of registered OWLs. In 2013 there were 136 OWLs listed for the US in the IWCA directory. Despite the fact that 7.1 million domestic students were taking at least one online course in 2012 (Allen and Seaman “Changing Course” 15), only 6 percent of the 2,226 public and private not-for-profit postsecondary institutions have a registered OWL with the IWCA. Unfortunately, this number may lead to the conclusion that the majority of online students attend universities without an established OWL and therefore must rely on instructors or outside tutoring services to provide them with feedback and revision suggestions on their written work.

The 2013 HigherEd.org survey reports 34 not-for-profit universities hosting 68 branch campuses in 29 countries around the world. Of these 34, I was able to contact 25

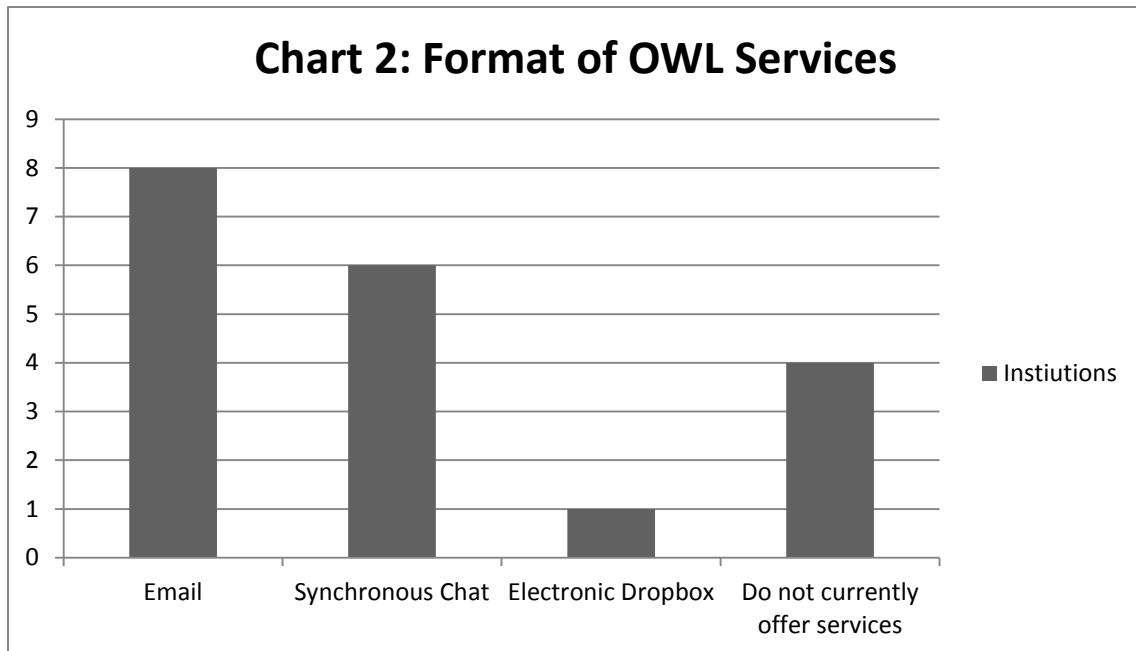
¹³ The IWCA does not claim to have a complete list of all US Writing Centers and OWLs; however, the list provided by the IWCA is the most complete currently available.

¹⁴ The IWCA, in conjunction with St. Cloud State University, compiles all registered writing center contact information in the Writing Center Directory.

Writing Center Directors, and to date I have received 15 responses to my “International Writing Center Presence and Practices” survey. The data collected show some surprising trends in the awareness of and offerings to international branch campuses by domestic university writing centers, as shown in Chart 1.



Eight of the fifteen responding Writing Center Directors report being aware of writing center facilities on branch campuses; however, only three actively coordinate with their international counterparts. Furthermore, only seven domestic writing centers offer some form of tutoring for students on branch campuses. Of the seven universities offering online sessions for students on international campuses, all seven offer these sessions via email, and six of those seven also offer online sessions through synchronous chat, as shown in Chart 2.



Among the different forms of online writing center practices put forward by Harris and Pamberton, the usual online practices of OWLs of email sessions and synchronous chat sessions fall into the categories of “interactive/time-displaced” and “interactive/real-time” respectively (147). An analysis of Harris and Pamberton’s system of classification for online writing center tutorials reveals that the classification of “real-time” does not necessarily mean that both student and tutor can see the changes made to a student’s work as they are being made. Instead “real-time” here simply refers to the fact that synchronous chat offers students an opportunity to chat with a tutor via the internet. Face-to-face interaction with the tutor is not possible in a chat room, which, as many scholars have pointed out, is not as effective in promoting student learning and ownership.¹⁵ One of the major drawbacks to synchronous chat sessions is that students

¹⁵ Zhang, Wei-yuan, Kirk Perris, and Lesley Yeung. “Online Tutorial Support in Online and Distance Learning: Student Perceptions.” *British Journal of Online Education Technologies* 36.5 (2005).

must have a very clear idea of what their issues are and the questions they need answered before they meet with the tutor in the chat room. Furthermore, synchronous chat tutorials often require that tutors devote more time to the session. This does not mean that the tutor and student meet for a longer period of time, but rather the responses to the survey indicate that synchronous chat is used as a secondary or follow-up method, meaning students typically email their papers to the tutor previous to the chat session, and the tutor then reads the paper and makes suggestions. The student then has the option to schedule a chat appointment with the tutor to ask clarifying questions or receive additional feedback. Thus, the tutor has now spent twice the time doing what is usually accomplished in one face-to-face session¹⁶.

Despite the drawbacks to synchronous chat, any real-time interaction with tutors, even if they cannot be physically seen, is better than the “time-displaced” option of email alone. Email does offer a convenient means of submitting and receiving a paper for both the student and the tutor, in that the submitting and replying can be done when it is most convenient for both student and tutor. Email does not have the time limitations that accompany the sometimes limited hours of writing center operation, or availability of online chats with tutors. Email’s major drawback is, in fact, caused by the very quality that makes it more convenient: no immediate response is required. Ideally, a student would send a paper during the specified hours and a tutor will review the paper and return it the same day; however, as any experienced writing center tutor or director will agree ideal situations rarely happen. As a result, students may have to wait a day or longer to

¹⁶ This claim is based on the common practice of 45-minute to hour-long appointments. The premise of the claim is that a tutor will spend about 45 minutes in the initial feedback stage of an email session and has the possibility of spending another 45 minutes in synchronous chat with the student. See Chapter Four for more discussion on email and chat OWL sessions.

receive their papers with the tutor's comments. Then if students have follow-up questions, need clarification about the suggestions made or would like to request additional materials to aid the revision process, they must wait to either receive a response email or find a time that a tutor will be available to meet with them in the chat room.

Although email and synchronous chat offer writing support to online students, it is clear that they may be less efficient than one would hope. The time both student and tutor must devote to these forms of sessions can easily become overwhelming, yet the time required for successful tutoring to occur dwindles in comparison to the implications that this format of online tutoring holds for international and ESOL students.

After working for many years in the writing center of a university with a large international population, one fact has become very clear: international and ESOL students require much feedback and in various forms. I have often found myself having to not only verbally explain my suggestions, but I also have to model sample sentences for the student, look up words, and use the translator in order to clarify my intended meaning. The simple fact is these students come to the writing center with a wide range of fluency levels in verbal and written English.¹⁷

The varying levels of fluency mean that tutors will spend more time discussing one issue with an ESOL student than they would with a native speaker. In a traditional face-to-face session, this obstacle can be overcome by trying various modes of communication and available resources to help the student understand before moving on;

¹⁷ For additional resources on successful ESL tutoring see: Myers, Sharon A. "Reassessing the Proofreading Trap": ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." *The Writing Center Journal* 24.1. (2003): 51-70.; Powers, Judith K. "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer." 13.2. (1993): 39-48; and Thonus, Terese. "Tutors as Teachers: Assisting ESL/EFL Students in the Writing Center." *TESOL Journal* 13.2. (1993): 13-27.

however, email sessions, for example, do not offer the opportunity for students to ask for clarification and receive an answer immediately. Synchronous chat assists in extra clarification that ESOL sessions often require, yet again, without the face-to-face interaction, it is hard for the tutor to really be sure that the student has fully understood the explanation and is referring to the same online materials that the tutor suggests. Furthermore, if ESOL students submit a paper via email and then need clarification but cannot chat with the tutor right away, they may forget the questions they have, or they may not be fluent enough to express the question clearly in writing when they are able to chat with the tutor. In instances like these, the face-to-face model of tutoring is much more effective because students can express themselves verbally and through writing and gesture if needed, and tutors can more easily judge the students' facial expression and body language to be certain that the explanation has been clear and understood.

Other than the innate issues of fluency and understanding of tutor instruction, writing center tutors often face the difficulty of establishing the US educational expectations in ESOL students. In a sense, tutors working with a high volume of ESOL students are also responsible for instilling the educational expectations of the US universities in the students they help. Chinese educational practices, for example, are based on teacher-centered classrooms where the students expect that the teacher will stand in the front and lecture, and students are expected to take notes, read the texts, and take tests to show what they have learned.¹⁸ In contrast, Western educational practices have moved towards a more student-centered approach, especially in postsecondary education. A student-centered pedagogy requires discussion and questions, and as earlier

¹⁸ This is the traditional assumption about Asian education practices as identified by Bradley and Bradley (1984), and Cortazzi & Jin 61.

scholarship shows, for many international students, the expectation of active participation and questioning is as foreign to them as the English language.¹⁹

As shown in the current writing center theories and practices scholarship, a successful writing center session is exactly that: student centered. Just as North and Brooks assert, the idea behind writing center tutorials is not to have tutors “fix” student papers, but rather make students into better overall writers by promoting personal ownership and providing the tools students need to better understand and identify their errors. In this sense, the writing center tutors’ expectation should be that through discussion and explanation, students will come to their own conclusions about their writing and how to best fix the errors in their writing, and this is precisely where cultural differences in educational expectations become a difficulty during writing center sessions. If an international student comes from a country where the common education practices are teacher-centered rather than student-centered, tutors quickly discover that much of the first couple of sessions with these students is spent gently prodding the students to ask questions, defend their opinions, and explain the logic behind the organization or construction of an argument. Again, neither synchronous chat nor email offer a suitable platform for the prodding and discussion that are needed in the early stages of establishing a tutor-student relationship with ESOL students on international branch campuses, as much of this relationship building is done through informal conversation and tutor consistency during writing center visits.

The necessity of informal and non-verbal communication when working with ESOL students has been addressed thoroughly in traditional writing center scholarship,

¹⁹ For newer and contrastive points of view on the students’ perceptions of traditional Chinese pedagogical methods, see Littlewood 3-28.

and practical experience has proven to any tutor, consultant, and director that the needs of ESOL students move beyond the needs of native speakers. International branch campuses have brought with them a rapid growth in the population of on-campus and online ESOL students across international borders, and OWL technologies must push forward to meet the needs of this student population. OWL theory and practice have developed quickly in the past twenty years, but the newly emerging populations of students on international branch campuses are posing a new set of problems for writing center directors wanting to expand online offerings and serve students on remote campuses. The innate difficulties in ESOL writing center sessions are only exacerbated in an online environment, and the now commonplace formats of email and synchronous chat sessions may not be efficient enough to truly promote fluency and coherence in international student writing. The extra time needed to fully discuss a paper and teach students to identify and correct their mistakes can frustrate both the student and tutor. So the question has become, how can domestic writing centers better serve international students? The answer may lie in the creative use of newly developed technologies and the formation of “face-to-face” online writing center sessions.

Chapter Four: Current and Newly Available OWL Technologies

The growing prevalence of international branch campuses, in combination with the written fluency requirements on these campuses, necessitates offering comprehensive writing center services for students across international borders. Less than half of US universities that host international branch campuses currently offer any writing center services to students on the international campuses, and those who do offer services are, for the most part, still using email and chat technologies.²⁰ Although email and chat are the familiar forms for online writing tutorials, advances in online collaboration technologies are now available that allow face-to-face interaction and real-time editing of student papers. The newer web-mediated technologies such as video chat, and file and screen sharing, allow for online sessions while preserving the theoretical and pedagogical beliefs of traditional writing centers (as discussed in Chapter Six).

Chat Supported Email Sessions

The standard format of an email session can be broken down into four parts: 1) the tutor receives a student paper and makes comments and corrections, 2) after the tutor has marked and returned the paper to the student, he or she makes the revisions suggested, 3) after revising, the student makes a follow-up appointment with the tutor to ask questions, if needed, and 4) the tutor and student meet in the writing center's synchronous chat room and discuss any concerns or questions that the student may have about the suggested revision.²¹ Working within this theoretical model, an email session has the potential to take the time that two traditional writing center visits would take

²⁰ See Chapter Three for survey results and analysis.

²¹ The process of email tutoring sessions discussed here is based on comments made by survey respondents and best practices publications. See: Murriel Harris and Micheal Pamberton "Online Writing Labs (OWLs): A Taxonomy of Options and Issues." *Computers and Composition* 12 (1995): 145-59.

because students are required to make a follow-up appointment to get the clarification they would receive immediately during a visit to the writing center. However, more prominent dangers lurk in the shadows of current OWL practices.

Email Sessions

All of the conveniences of email writing center sessions for both the tutor and the student inherently bring an unseen danger: it is too easy to simply edit a paper when there is no opportunity for discussion with the tutee. Tutors tend to fall back on the role of editor all too easily, even in writing centers that do not conduct email sessions.

Inexperienced tutors especially have a difficult time avoiding the editor role. New tutors might take students' papers and read quietly to themselves, marking and correcting errors in grammar and punctuation without ever discussing why they are changing what the student has done or showing the student how to correct the error. At the end of these "editing" sessions, the student may have a more polished paper, but ultimately, the student has also learned nothing. According to Jeff Brooks, "This is a Writing Center worst nightmare" (136) because the purpose of the writing tutor is to teach, not edit.

Email sessions can reinforce the editor function of a writing center tutor. When reviewing and making comments on emailed student papers, the tutor cannot see or hear the author. Tutors do not have the opportunity to ask questions of students, seek clarification, or to truly *teach* students how to correct commonly made errors. Whether the tutor makes the decision consciously or unconsciously, at one point or another, the tutor will simply edit the paper and return it to the student. The end result of these sessions is students have learned nothing except that the writing center will correct their grammar and punctuation and the paper will receive higher marks on grammatical

conventions. Thus, the ever-present issue in the mind of writing center directors offering online sessions is how writing centers can ensure that tutors are trying to actively engage and teach the students.

Synchronous Chat sessions

In response to the shortcomings of email-mediated sessions, most writing centers offering online services through email also offer synchronous chat sessions. Synchronous chat allows the tutor and the tutee to login to a chat room and have real-time conversations. In the chat rooms students can ask tutors questions and receive answers immediately. In spite of the real-time features of synchronous chat, chat sessions are often used as supplementary to email sessions, and for good reason.²²

When compared to email, synchronous chat does in fact offer a better way for tutors and students to communicate online because of the immediate nature of the chat room interface, yet the chat room does not offer enough interaction to meet the pedagogical and theoretical standards of accepted writing center practices. If the goal of a tutoring session is in fact as Stephen North says, to create better writers and not necessarily better writing (80), then chat rooms are only marginally more effective than email sessions. Tutor and tutee cannot look at the paper together in a standard chat room; therefore, to have a successful session where the tutor teaches and the students learns, three things must happen before the chat room session: First, tutees must email tutors their papers to have the first round of comments made, and tutors can familiarize themselves with the students' writing. Second, students will have to ensure that they schedule a chat room session with the same tutor who conducted the email session.

²² According to survey results, of the eight campuses offering email sessions, seven of those campuses also offer synchronous chat sessions.

Finally, students must have clear and concise questions for tutors to answer in the chat room. Only when these three criteria are met can a chat room session be truly successful; consequently, although offering synchronous chat in conjunction with email sessions does increase tutee participation and allow for opportunities for immediate feedback, the increased time requirements of the tutor and students hinder the writing session process, and synchronous chat still does not address concerns about tutors acting as editors in email sessions.

Technological Innovations

When OWLs first emerged in the 1990s, the options for online writing tutoring were relatively limited. As discussed in Chapter Three, Harris and Pamberton identified the available options for online tutoring as of 1995. In 1995, universities wanting to offer online tutoring were given the options of email, synchronous chat, drop-box, and gophers (147). However, as collaborative web technologies have continued to develop, new online features have emerged that make face-to-face online sessions a very real option for OWLs. A discussion of the current technologies and a comparative analysis of current competitive products will show how transferring the theoretical and pedagogical practices of the traditional writing center can be easily achieved. A more thorough discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical implications of online sessions is offered in Chapter Six.

Video Chat

Video chat features are now widely used for business and personal communications. Video chat is a web-based interface using webcams and microphones to allow people or groups of people to see and hear one another from anywhere in the

world. Online tutoring services, such as InstEDU.com, have already taken advantage of the face-to-face interactions facilitated by video chat platforms.

In terms of video chat use in writing centers, video chat enables tutors and tutees to meet online and see and hear each other as they discuss student writing. Theoretically speaking, there has been much discussion about the role of the tutor-tutee relationship, and most agree that the relationship is best established when tutor and tutee are physically present during the sessions (Eckard 36). Thus, when working with students across international borders, a virtual presence can act as a suitable substitute for a physical writing center. Video chat allows tutors to read students' facial expressions and judge comprehension. Moreover, the tutor-tutee relationship will be established more quickly when a student can place a name to a face and talk freely during a session, instead of focusing on how to phrase a question in writing during synchronous chat.

Aside from the benefits to the tutor and tutee, video chat platforms also regularly include recording features, which can be used to review online sessions and address any issues through training. The ability to record and review sessions permits writing center directors to observe the tutors and design training programs around the specific concerns or patterns in the videos. The broader scope of training implications translates to both online and on-campus writing center sessions, as issues with communication, explanation, and techniques are essentially the same on- or off-line.²³

In addition to the continuous training implications, the recording function offered by video chat platforms is also ideal for students. A recorded session can be reviewed by the users or administrators at any time, so if students have difficulty remembering what tutors said about a particular section or concern, they have the option to review the

²³ For further discussion on the training implications, see Chapter Six.

session and hear the tutors' words again. The students' ability to review a session and refresh their memory is not available in a traditional writing center session, and could increase students' knowledge retention and facilitate learning.

Theoretically, video chat platforms better meet the requirements of tutor-tutee bonding and interaction than email and synchronous chat. The most widely known video chat platform is Skype, which allows users to chat with other individuals or groups at no cost.

File and Screen Sharing

Most video chat programs now also include file and screen sharing features. File sharing allows students to share files with tutors through the video chat interface, and screen sharing features display the paper and other information on the screens of both participants; hence, students and tutors can not only see and hear each other, but they can also see and discuss changes being made to student papers as they are being made. Furthermore, screen sharing features will allow tutors to direct students to the appropriate online resources and discuss the resources in detail.

File and screen sharing features lend themselves nicely to Harris's collaborative learning approach to writing center sessions by creating a space that is more akin to the traditional face-to-face setting. It is not uncommon for students to bring in laptops or use computers supplied in the writing center during a session and work on a digital copy of papers, just as it is not uncommon for tutors to use computers to access and discuss online resources with students, define words, or find appropriate synonyms. University writing centers, like many facets of higher education, have become increasingly virtual,

so moving from physical paper copies to working collaboratively through computer-mediated sessions will not be difficult for students and tutors.

Pedagogically, file- and screen-sharing features allow tutors to practice minimalistic tutoring. Although there is no pencil to hand to the student or table to move away from to increase student participation during a session, screen sharing does allow the tutor to simply refuse to type, and therefore, require students to actively participate in the composition/revision process. File and screen sharing also opens an entire area of continuous training to writing center directors: online collaboration training. Tutors will need to be trained in appropriate behaviors and the expectations of online collaboration at various levels to remain effective in an online environment.

Editing Tools

A unique feature offered by a limited number of online collaborative platforms is built-in editing tools within the file and screen sharing interface. Editing features include the ability to insert notes in the margin of papers, draw lines and write in corrections above the original, and use common editing marks. The most competitive product to offer editing tools on the market currently is Microsoft Office 365.

Editing tools allow tutors to make suggestions and corrections directly in the file while keeping the students' original text intact. By identifying each error on the paper physically, students and tutors can see the major mistake patterns and areas or skills to focus on in future sessions. Furthermore, tutors can easily model the editing process when suggestions can be made on student papers without changing or deleting the original text. Much research shows that modeling is helpful for increasing ESOL students' language competencies and written fluency (Ritter 102). Like the recording

feature, editing tools promote continuous training of tutors. Writing center directors can use the opportunity to train tutors in digital editing, developing technologically versed tutors that may be moving into the increasingly virtual educational environment.

Online Scheduling

The final online feature required to successfully implement international online sessions is an online scheduling platform. Online scheduling should allow students to schedule appointments with specific tutors, while taking into account differences in time zones and the International Date Line. An online schedule must also require a student or tutor account for viewing the schedule and making appointments; at the same time, online scheduling systems must deny student accounts direct access to other scheduled appointment information. Software providers such as Adobe offer online scheduling features for an additional cost.

Comparative Analysis of Current Competitive Products

Skype, Microsoft Office 365, and Adobe Connect each offer most or all of the above discussed features, so the final decision of which product to use for international online writing center sessions will be based on two considerations: which features the tutors require and the budget available for the development of international online sessions. Each of the products will allow for video chat sessions and file sharing, enabling real-time edits that both the tutor and the student can see. In addition, each of the products has a record feature so sessions can be reviewed for training and evaluation purposes. Therefore, the unique features and cost of each product will be the primary reasons why one product may be chosen over another.

Skype is the most viable option for writing centers with tight budgets, as the services necessary to conduct basic online sessions are completely free. Skype users can use video chat and use file- and screen-sharing features with any other Skype user around the world at no cost. Moreover, the Skype interface shows the local time of each user; therefore, when tutors log in and select the profile of the student or writing center they are connecting with, tutors can see the local time in that country. The availability of local time ensures that the tutor and the student are contacting each other at the scheduled time. However, the Skype interface does not offer the editing tools of Microsoft 365. Furthermore, Skype does not offer online file storage.

In contrast to Skype, Adobe Connect does offer a free online file storage option with a paid subscription. The group chat sessions included in the standard business licensing of Adobe Connect allow up to 25 people to meet virtually. Each member of the group session is able to see the other participants and see the files being shared and changed within the group. Unfortunately, Adobe Connect is more expensive than Microsoft 365, with business licensing potentially costing thousands of dollars annually, depending on the features desired. Also, like Skype, Adobe Connect is not necessarily designed for editing and does not have built-in editing tools.

Microsoft Office 365 is the most comprehensive product for the purposes of online writing center sessions. The editing functions of MS Word allow the tutor to insert notes and suggestions directly into the file. The notes are then saved on the document and students are able to reference the notes and revision suggestions as they continue to work on their paper after the session, without having to scroll through a list of notes in a text dialogue box or review the recorded session. Essentially, the editing tools of MS Word

make it possible for students to receive feedback on digital drafts in the same manner that the feedback would be given on a physical copy. This single feature will ease the transition from traditional to virtual tutoring sessions. Microsoft 365 also offers online file storage and a secure network for sessions, just like Adobe Connect. Microsoft 365 subscriptions also require payment; however, the charge for educational institutions is minimal, roughly \$600 annually; a university with an existing Microsoft volume license may be able to negotiate prices with its Microsoft representative.²⁴

Conclusion

Email and synchronous chat have been, in the past, the best options for online tutoring, but real-time, interactive online tutorials across international borders are now possible with the help of video chat platforms with recording features, editing tools, and online scheduling applications. Each feature needed to conduct real-time, interactive sessions is available from different companies, for varying prices, to accommodate any size program and budget.

These technologies will facilitate the transition from traditional to virtual tutoring and open new venues for tutor training. Meanwhile, students will benefit from the face-to-face interaction with tutors, the ability to review recorded sessions, and the opportunity to actively participate in the virtual revision process. It is important to remember, however, that implementing the new online sessions will come with its own set of problems that must be addressed.

²⁴ Claim is based on the discussion with Microsoft representative Jessica on 16 April 2014.

Chapter Five: Foreseeable Difficulties

The newly developed technologies available to make international online writing center tutoring feasible offer a wide range of general and unique features to ease the transitions from traditional to online sessions. A comparative analysis of the technology shows that there is a product available that can be suitably used for most any university, regardless of budgetary restrictions and tutor availability. That is not to say, however, that any of these technologies is not without its drawbacks and potential difficulties.

Anticipating every difficulty a university may have with conducting online writing center tutorials is impossible, but universal difficulties may arise during the development and implementing processes. Varying infrastructures, ESOL tutoring pedagogical implications in an online environment, tutor training, and the various geographical and political issues all pose difficulties to the successful implementation of real-time, interactive online writing center tutorials.

Tutoring

Writing Center and tutoring scholarship have a common thread in that both focus on the relationship between tutor and tutee. In the traditional writing center it can take a couple of appointments to build a working relationship with international tutees, especially, with students from more socially conservative countries. Chinese students and female Saudi students, for example, may be shyer than traditional American students and may take longer to actively participate in the tutoring process. On campuses with large international populations, it is common to see a tutor and a student seemingly working on nothing and simply talking. Tutor and tutee may discuss the tutee's goals, experience in America, or simply the tutee's understanding of class and assignment objectives. These

sessions serve two purposes: First, they allow the tutor and the student to get to know each other, and secondly, they allow students to become comfortable talking to the tutor and expressing their opinions.

Making an international student feel comfortable enough to talk with a tutor and participate in the learning process is no small feat and is an undeniably important part of successful tutoring (Ryan 47, Harris 29, and Eckard 36). Without active tutee participation and investment, a writing tutor is not effective; instead, students will take a passive approach to the sessions, expecting the tutor to correct mistakes whether or not the corrections encompass the intended meaning of the student.

The process of bonding with a tutee can be difficult with some students in a traditional writing center setting, and bonding only becomes more difficult when the sessions are moved online. Online environments inherently tend to cause a disconnect between participants. The distance between tutor and tutee online poses a problem when online tutoring is approached in the traditional time-displaced manner of email sessions. As discussed in Chapter Four, email sessions do not allow for the relational and content questioning (Schmidt 51-53)²⁵ that fosters the success of traditional face-to-face writing center sessions. Moving online tutoring sessions to a real-time platform, however, allows the student and tutor to communicate verbally and discuss the changes being made as they are made, thus, preserving the face-to-face format of the sessions and allowing for student and tutor to develop the relationship necessary for productive sessions. The interactive online technologies facilitate tutor-tutee interaction and, therefore, promote

²⁵ As defined by Schmidt, relational questions refer to those questions tutors ask to form a relationship with a student, and content questions refer to questions asked about the assignment or paper.

the bonding of tutor and tutee, which is especially helpful when working with ESOL students.

In conjunction with the tutor-tutee relationship-building processes needed to facilitate constructive online sessions, tutors must be aware of the cultural differences between themselves and the students they are serving. US universities have an individualistic culture, meaning that students are responsible for doing their own work, participating in class, and attributing any information used in research to the appropriate source author. On the other hand, many Eastern collectivist cultures do not stress attribution of source materials, and the educational dynamics of the universities is very different in that students are expected to listen to lectures, read their texts, and compose essays relaying the information they have gathered throughout the course (Cortazzi and Jin 69). The variances in cultural expectations of education are apparent when working with international students in the writing center.

The cultural differences between international and native students are plainly seen if one were to observe a writing center serving large populations of international clients. The tutor-tutee pairings from the same cultural backgrounds have more active conversations and the exchange of opinions is clear. If the tutor-tutee pairing consists of students of different nationalities, however, the conversation may be minimal and the tutee might be described as either passive or frustrated. Working with numerous Chinese graduate students, I have experienced the effect cultural differences have on a writing center session first hand. It may take two or three sessions, or even an entire semester, to

develop an inquisitive and proactive relationship with Chinese students, as I discovered with Mary.²⁶

When Mary and I began working together, she was reserved, quiet, and would not look me in the eye for more than a second at a time. Throughout our first semester working together, I tried to get Mary to open up to me and find her voice as a writer and a person; she had to begin expressing her own opinions and views, so our sessions could move beyond editing. It took about three months, but eventually, Mary did begin to open up to me and we worked together for the following two years, accomplishing more than either of us had thought possible. Mary's shy demeanor and uncertainty of her own expertise are not personality traits exclusive to her; the cultural constructs behind her understanding of the education process played a major role in her approach to tutoring, just as these constructs play a major role for any student. Mary and I were able to work through the cultural differences and successfully negotiated our own culture as tutor and tutee.

Students like Mary, and tutors like myself will be faced with the difficult task of negotiating cultural differences in any writing center, but the differences are more pronounced when sessions are moved online. When Mary was being passive, sitting quietly waiting for me to correct her paper, I was able to hand her the pencil and move away from the table slightly.²⁷ When she was stuck and looking for me to write sentences for her, I was able to excuse myself and allow her to work alone for a few minutes; but can tutors adapt these behaviors to suit online sessions? Although there are no pencils to hand over, or tables to move back or excuse yourself from, tutors can easily remind

²⁶ The student's name has been changed to protect her identity.

²⁷ For a discussion on defensive minimalistic tutoring strategies, see Brooks (173).

students that the session and the final product is solely dependent on the participation of the student (Brooks 172). Moreover, developing the tutor-tutee relationship and negotiating the writing center culture will not necessarily be more difficult online than it is in a traditional setting. Teaching tutors the proper techniques to deal with passive students and address cultural differences in an appropriate way must be reiterated during training for online tutors, and the problems related to cultural differences and the tutor-tutee relationship will naturally be resolved.²⁸

Aside from establishing a relationship that facilitates the proactive learning of international students during online sessions, tutors will be faced with varying rhetorical constructions and styles depending on the nationality of the student they are working with. The contrasting rhetorical structures of different nations quickly becomes evident when working with international students; for example, the Japanese, and other Asian rhetorical traditions, have been described as indirect, or “reader responsible” (Kubota & Lehner 8). Similarly, Asian and Middle-Eastern rhetorical traditions tend to have a point-last construction; whereas, the Anglophone tradition relies on point-first construction.²⁹ The differences in rhetorical constructs may be difficult for tutors to navigate, but with the proper training and knowledge of the technologies available for use during online sessions, this barrier can be overcome and the online session will provide resources and opportunities for explanation comparable to a traditional face-to-face session.

²⁸ For an in-depth discussion of training protocols and tutor techniques see Chapter Six

²⁹ In-depth discussion of the rhetorical constructions of various languages can be found in Connor, Ulla. *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

As is the case with traditional face-to-face tutoring, ESOL students bring with them an inherent set of difficulties when entering an online session.³⁰ The most prevalent of these issues is the language barrier between students and tutors. ESOL students come to writing centers with varying levels of English fluency and competencies; especially, in writing.³¹ It has often been the case in my own Writing Center that tutors are faced with extreme variances in ESOL students' writing, speaking, and listening competencies. That is, one student may come in able to clearly and fluently articulate his or her point and idea to the tutor but he or she will have a difficult time with academic English grammatical conventions. Another student may come to the Writing Center unable to verbally communicate his or her point or idea to the tutor, yet the writing will reflect a more comprehensive and complex style. In any case, these situations are not surprising or new to seasoned writing center tutors and directors.

Seasoned tutors and directors are equipped to deal with the discrepancies in student knowledge and comprehension but moving to an online environment can and will, more often than not, lead to the exasperation of comprehension and fluency issues. In a traditional face-to-face writing center session, tutors and students are able to use multi-modal communication in that they can write, speak, diagram, and use internet technologies to translate when needed. Although the newer online collaborative products help alleviate these issues with the addition of the webcam and screen-sharing technologies, tutors conducting international sessions online will surely still experience an increase in misunderstandings by both the tutor and the student. Microphones, for

³⁰ See McAndrew and Reigstad 97, Ryan 45-6.

³¹ Ibid.

instance, distort voices regardless of fluency; moreover, using a microphone through a computer-mediated interface can further distort the human voice.

Technological Drawbacks

The distortion caused by microphones may stall the progress of the appointment, requiring more time or multiple appointments to complete one paper. Fortunately, the Microsoft, Adobe, and Skype interfaces each offer a text interface allowing for written communication outside of the paper, which can help alleviate miscommunication. An additional feature that Adobe, Microsoft, and Skype have in common is screen-sharing. Using screen-sharing features is especially helpful if an online translator, dictionary, or source needs to be referred to during the session. Screen-sharing allows both parties to see the same information at the same time which will help facilitate meaningful discussion. Each of the three discussed technologies also has the capability to connect to various whiteboards or “smart boards.”³² Smart boards can be used to diagram or draw when either party needs to find a different way to communicate. The verbal distortion of the microphones used during video chat is, therefore, more of an inconvenience than hindrance. With a little practice and patience both the tutor and student will have the means to overcome the difficulty.

Other than the distortion of voices, the development of online scheduling systems which account for differences in time zones and, in some cases, the International Date Line will cause difficulties as host universities begin implementing international sessions. Furthermore, finding and training tutors that are willing to work the odd hours the varying time zones may require could prove to be difficult. Negotiating time and distance is an unavoidable byproduct of international writing tutorials. Adobe does offer a

³² For more information on product specific capabilities, see Chapter Four

scheduling tool, which the Adobe technicians will program and maintain, but this feature costs an additional monthly fee. The fee may also vary depending on the functions the host writing center needs it to perform and the complexity of the website design and tracking desired (Adobe). If a host university does not have the budget to pay a monthly fee to have an online appointment book developed and maintained Adobe is not a feasible option; however, there are more fiscally manageable options, though these cheaper options may require more investment of the Director's time.

For the fiscally conservative university, online software companies such as Google offer more fiscally responsible options for online appointment logs. Google Calendar, for example, does have the features required to create an online scheduler; albeit, a cruder version of a professionally programmed appointment book, but an online interface nonetheless. With Google Calendar, Writing Center Directors can designate international tutor times with the option of allowing another google user to "schedule" that slot by requesting an invite. The invite is then confirmed by the tutor or the writing center director and only the calendar's administrator can change the calendar information (Google). The drawbacks of services like Google Calendar are that the administrators cannot set log-in credentials other than "google user," so anyone with a registered Google account may have access to the schedule once it is open to the public. Additionally, Google parameters and features cannot be changed by users; therefore, directors will only be able to use the features they are familiar with, limiting the systems capabilities. Moreover, a Google Calendar does not account for differences in time zones, let alone the International Date Line, so either the student or the tutor would be responsible for calculating the exact time and date of an online appointment. Finally, if a university opts

to use Google Calendar, it will most likely not want to pay a web designer and therefore the programming and maintenance of a Goggle Calendar would be left to Directors and staff.

Online scheduling can be a difficult task to negotiate in during the early phases of developing real-time international online writing centers, but the time and difficulty scheduling poses can be resolved relatively easily compared to the larger issues. Perhaps the most concerning and immediate difficulty with the development of international writing center visits is ensuring that both the host and branch university have the infrastructure to support online technologies. It is true that most branch campuses are in countries throughout the EU, the UAE, and Asia, so internet access is readily available, but the connectivity may or may not have the bandwidth, speed, and Ethernet or WiFi access at each individual campus to allow for the smooth operation of the online software.

Without a deep understanding of each of these components and the availability of each on individual campus, it is impossible to put a program in place. On the Lanzhou City University campus in Lanzhou, Gansu, China, for example, the University does not provide internet access at high enough speeds to allow for the operation of Skype. According to a Chinese national coming from Lanzhou, students are able to plug into an Ethernet line in the library to access high speed internet, but each student is responsible to pay for the high-speed connection out of his or her own pocket.³³ This means that although the infrastructure is in place to support the technology, the cost is not covered,

³³ Claims based on personal communication with a Chinese student who attended Lanxhou University before transferring to the US.

so who then pays for the availability of high-speed connections to support online tutorials?

A more difficult problem to overcome than the question of cost is what is to be done if the infrastructure to support such online programs simply is not in place. It may be the case on some campuses that high-speed internet access is not available at all depending on the location of the campus and existing city infrastructure. In these situations the host and branch campuses have two options for online tutoring: A) develop a plan and come to an agreement about who pays which cost to help develop the infrastructure, which could take years, or B) offer online sessions via email without the benefits of the newer technologies. The options may not be ideal, but campuses are only able to work with the infrastructure they have available when developing and offering online services.

Another unavoidable drawback is the technical issues that are bound to arise throughout the course of an online session. Lost or slow internet connections will freeze the video or drop one or both parties from the call, causing the tutor and student to try to reconnect, or reschedule. Equipment malfunctions can, and surely will, occur at one point or another. Whether the problem is on the side of the tutor or the student, a microphone that suddenly stops working or a speaker blowing out will require that the session is paused and/or rescheduled while the problem is fixed. Technology is not perfect and therefore will not function perfectly at all times, but that should not keep universities from using available technologies to offer more comprehensive services to international campuses.

Conclusion

As is the case with any computer mediated educational service, developing interactive, real-time online writing center sessions for students on international branch campuses will be difficult. Navigating disparities in existing infrastructure and any legal barriers to internet usage will not be an easy task; however, with consistent communication between host and branch campus and a fair action plan, the program can be put in place. Unavoidable technical issues like lost connections, software corruption, and equipment malfunctions are the reality of computer and internet mediated education, and as such, each of these issues will require patience and understanding from all parties involved. Finally, the cultural and comprehensive variances between tutor and student are best addressed through tutor training and a deep understanding of the pedagogical goals of a writing center.

Chapter Six: Implications

At first glance, the idea of implementing face-to-face writing tutorials using web-mediated platforms and technologies can seem daunting, at the very least; however, the capabilities of modern internet communication technologies allow for an easy transfer of traditional writing center theory and practice. Small modifications will be necessary to cope with the varying computer skills of tutors and create well-rounded, culturally aware tutors, but these problems, in actuality, offer substantial opportunity to continue developing modern writing center theory, pedagogy, and practice. Moreover, the training requirements of tutors conducting these types of online sessions can be carried away from the university writing center by tutors and into future professions. Foundational writing center theories and practices can be carried over with little to no modification to face-to-face online sessions. Pedagogical changes, however, must be made when working with ESOL students, and finally, tutors must experience appropriate and new continuous training topics.

Writing Center Theory and Pedagogy

From the “fix-it shops” (North 75) of the 1930s to the multimedia modern writing centers, writing centers have experienced a multitude of shifts during the past century. Theories have come and gone from the sphere of acceptance, but a few names remain as influential today as they were in the scholars’ heyday. It is the lasting theories that demonstrate that moving face-to-face sessions onto web-mediated platforms does not pose the theoretical difficulties that early OWLs may have experienced.

The Importance of Talking

Donald Murray, perhaps one of the best known names in writing tutor scholarship, posed a model for writing conferences in “The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference” (1979) and later in “Teaching the Other Self: The Writer’s First Reader” (1982). Throughout his career and in these articles particularly, Murray espouses the importance of students’ thoughts and concerns about their own writing. In “The Listening Eye,” Murray expresses how he feels when developing his renowned writing conferences:

I feel as if I have been searching for years for the right questions, questions which would establish a tone of master and apprentice, no, the voice of a fellow craftsman having a conversation about a piece of work, writer to writer, neither praise nor criticism, but questions which imply further drafts, questions which draw helpful comments out of the student writer. (151-2)

Murray’s approach to writing conferences with students has been widely adopted in writing center theory. Tutors should encourage students to do most of the talking during a session and allow the students to find logical fallacies and sections needing clarification on their own.

In 1982, Murray takes the idea of student-led dialogue during conferences to another level in “Teaching the Other Self.” Here Murray explains the necessity of understanding the internal dialogue of students. Murray, again using the analogy of craftsmen, says, “The act of writing might be described as a conversation between two workmen muttering to each other. The self speaks, the other self listens and responds”

(145). The listening in this instance is occurring when the students listen to themselves in the natural internal dialogue of writers. This idea has also been adopted by writing centers, and Murray's influence can be seen in the "probing questions" approach to tutoring.

Murray's focus on engaging students through conversation is echoed by Donald Graves in his 1983 publication *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, in which Graves sets a minimum speaking ratio of 80:20 during writing tutoring; that is, the student should speak for 80 percent of the appointment and the tutor should speak only about 20 percent of their time together. Graves also promotes the practice of intentional silence during tutoring. According to Graves it is not only appropriate but also sometimes necessary for tutors to sit silently awaiting a student's response after asking probing questions (215).

In traditional writing center sessions, Murray's thoughts on the importance of student speech, and Graves' focus on intentional silence are clearly seen. Tutors sit down with students and begin asking questions about the purpose, audience, and intended meaning of the students' papers. The students then are put in the position to explain and defend their point or thought process while writing. The probing questions approach to tutoring has become a natural part of traditional tutoring sessions, but the commonly used forms of email and follow-up using synchronous chat do not necessarily allow time and opportunity for tutors to pose probing questions. Furthermore, an extended intentional silence during a synchronous chat session may be construed as sarcasm or indifference on part of the tutor—or even an equipment failure. The lack of physical presence, facial expressions, and body language deeply hinders the ability of tutors to draw out self-awareness from students.

The face-to-face platforms of video chat software, on the other hand, naturally bring the probing question approach to tutoring back to the forefront. Tutors and tutees can converse freely and in a more natural manner when they can see and hear one another. Hearing the tone of the question and seeing tutors' facial expressions as they wait for the student to respond will help to put the student at ease, especially, students who may need a bit longer to formulate a coherent answer in a second language.

Peer Tutors

Muriel Harris of Purdue University and contemporary writing center scholar focuses on the continuing betterment of writing center sessions and tutor-tutee conversations. For nearly three decades Harris insisted that writing centers should be actively pursuing higher quality interactions during tutoring sessions. To Harris, writing tutorials should be a collaborative process occurring between writer and peer tutor. She sums up her ideas in "Why Writers Need Writing Tutors," saying "the most satisfying tutorials are those in which students were active participants in finding their own criteria and solutions" (31). In Harris's view, tutors are to act as a sounding board for students, offering advice and gently guiding them in the direction they want to go.

Student-guided tutoring sessions, which Harris likely modified from Murray's emphasis on talking, have also been readily adopted into the theoretical framework of modern writing centers. Like Jeff Brooks, Harris asserts that the student, not the tutor, should do most of the work; the tutor is simply there to provide support and guidance, and these ideas are easily transferred to an online setting if the tutor and tutee have true real-time interaction and contact. The file and screen sharing features of online collaborative software allow the tutor to pull up and share vital resources with students as

they work together through papers. Moreover, the editing tools offered by some products like Microsoft 365 facilitate tutor comments and student understanding through modeling.

Minimalistic Tutoring

In his well-known article “Minimalistic Tutoring: Making the Student Do all the Work,” Jeff Brooks asserts that a truly successful writing center session is not one in which the students leave with a polished edited paper, but rather students should leave having learned something and beginning to change the way they look at writing (170). Brooks, therefore, discusses ways to encourage students to do the work and actively participate in the learning process during sessions, including moving the paper physically closer to the students, having students hold the pencil and make the corrections, and of course, getting students to talk about their writing (171-72). Brooks also suggests techniques for dealing with difficult or resistant students like moving away from the desk or table slightly and being completely honest and telling students that it is their paper and the corrections have to be their own (173). In short, students should own their writing and learn during tutoring, and tutors should not act as editors despite pressure from some students.

Brooks’s approach to minimalistic tutoring has become a main tenet of writing centers, but when tutoring is moved online, it can become easier to become an editor and not a tutor. As discussed in Chapter Four, email tutoring sessions have the tendency to foster an editor mentality in tutors, either because the student has not been clear about his or her goals for the paper, or the tutor does not have the training to provide meaningful feedback electronically. The face-to-face format of video chat, and the live editing

capabilities of file and screen sharing, however, will allow for the transfer of Brooks's minimalistic tutoring techniques. Using these technologies, tutors have the opportunity to start a meaningful dialogue with students, respond immediately to questions or concerns, and share resources. Tutors can also simply not type the corrections into the paper, just as traditional tutors can hand the pencil to the student.

In terms of minimalistic tutoring techniques with students resisting tutoring, tutors will not be able to use a complete range of body language to encourage student involvement, but there are a few techniques that will work well via webcam. First, the tutor can still move away from the desk slightly. Despite the fact that students are not able to see the tutor's entire body, they will be able to see a difference in posture if the tutor were to sit back in the chair or move away from the screen. In these cases facial expressions and the tutor's line of vision will also play a significant role. Whether or not students are consciously aware of the fact that they can tell where the tutor is looking on the screen, the subtle differences in the line of sight will be noticed. Tutors should remain focused on the student, or the webcam, to give the impression of direct eye contact and avoid looking directly at the paper until the student has asked a specific question. Tutors may also look away from the screen all together to indicate that they will not make the corrections for the student.

Small cues in facial expression and posture will communicate to students that they are expected to participate, but there will be times that the tutor's approach to encouraging engagement will have to be more direct. In the cases of the extremely resistant student, honesty is in fact the best policy. Students who consistently respond to tutors' questions with "I don't know" or "Well, what should I say then?" will need to be

reminded that the paper is theirs alone and the tutor is there to teach, not write the paper. This can be done easily. The tutor will simply have to tell the student, in a non-confrontational manner, “This is your paper and not mine. I am happy to guide you in the right direction, but I cannot tell you what to write.” Brooks agrees that the direct approach is sometimes the best approach and that tutors should not avoid being honest with students, saying “I have found this approach doesn’t upset students as it might seem it would; they know what they are doing, and when you show that you do too, they accept that” (173).

ESOL Tutoring

Donald McAndrew and Thomas Reigstad explain in *Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences*, the student populations attending US schools have become increasingly diverse in the last thirty years (96). McAndrew and Reistad continue by saying “Because ESL writers and tutors have backgrounds different from those of the monolingual groups in which tutoring procedures were developed, ESL writers will require a perhaps substantial modification of those procedures” (96-97). In other words, tutors should be aware that a more directive approach to tutoring may be more appropriate when tutoring ESOL students.

In contrast to Harris’s view of collaborative tutoring, Judith Powers cautions tutors about the necessity to move out of the role of tutor and be willing to move into the role of teacher while working with ESOL students. Powers explains in “Rethinking Writing Conference Strategies for the ESL Writer” that the University of Wyoming’s Writing Center tutors had always

... intended to lead writers to good solutions rather than answers, solutions that were theirs, not the tutor's. Unfortunately, this process which has generally served native-speaking writers well (Harris, Leahy), and is justifiably a source of pride for those who can make it work, was often ineffective for our second-language writers, especially those confronting college-level writing in English for the first time. (40)

Powers continues to defend her claim that tutors should act as “teachers of an academic subject” (43), by showing the cultural and rhetorical style differences that ESOL students bring with them to the writing center, and concluding that information regarding logical sequences, grammar rules, and syntax must be imparted to ESOL students during tutoring sessions.

Given the amount of guidance needed by many ESOL students, email and chat sessions are not ideal because of the lack of available resources to be discussed and the risk that tutors will edit the paper and not discuss with the students, in detail, why certain grammatical changes had to be made. In spite of the hindrances of the traditional online tutoring platforms, online ESOL tutoring can be greatly improved with the introduction of new online technologies. As discussed in Chapter Three, the first step to achieving active engagement from ESOL students is to develop a tutor-tutee relationship, which the real-time, face-to-face contact provided through video chat offers. Next, multimodal communication and an abundance of resources are also needed for ESOL tutoring, which are provided through the text chat dialogue boxes and screen-sharing features.

In terms of writing center theory and pedagogy, creating a real-time, interactive virtual space for international tutorials does not require much change to the basic tenets

currently and traditionally held in writing center scholarship. With small modifications to tutor behaviors and facial expression, even the most resistant students can become engaged, just as they would in a traditional writing center session. Current technologies also make sharing files, resources, and multimodal communication possible across international borders. Thus, with the proper training, 21st century writing centers and tutors can better help students on international branch campuses.

Implications for Recruitment and Training

Just as the training methods and recruitment processes had to change with the influx of international and ESOL students attending US universities in the past thirty years, the recruitment and training of tutors will need to be modified to account for the new online environments used in international sessions. Writing center directors wanting to offer more comprehensive services to students on international branch campuses will need to consider a variety of factors when designing the programs. The recruitment process for writing center tutors should be changed to be more inclusive, and tutor training should become more specialized in cultural expectations, educational practices, and contrastive rhetoric. By addressing each of these areas, writing center directors will find that their tutors are better equipped to successfully tutor students across international borders.

Recruitment

Near the turn of the century universities started experiencing a dramatic increase in international student populations (McAndrew and Reider 96), and started to recruit a diverse array of students, yet still requiring them to tutor in English and be exceptional students. On the surface, it would appear that nothing is necessarily wrong with the

writing tutor recruitment processes as they have developed and adapted to changing university demographics over time; however, at least two facets of the recruitment process must be addressed and changed if an international online writing center is to succeed.

One issue with recruitment that must be addressed immediately upon opening an international online writing center is the idea that all tutors must be able to tutor in English and must ideally, be native speakers. Although the native-speaking tutor tutoring in English appears to be an unspoken rule, it is time to rethink the unspoken and widen the recruiting class to include more international students, especially, those students from the countries in which individual university's host branch campuses. At the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication, faculty of Florida International University (FIU), Miami, presented their findings in multilingual tutoring in the Writing Center.

FIU has a large international population, primarily made up of Cuban and Chinese nationals. Writing Center Director, Paula Gillespie, and Assistant Director, Glenn Hutchison, have recently started to allow, in fact encourage, their Spanish-speaking and Mandarin-speaking tutors to conduct part of their sessions in the students' native language. In the presentation Gillespie said that reason for the change in policy came from the observations made when reviewing the video footage of ESOL tutoring sessions. It appeared that there were times during the sessions that ESOL students were having a difficult time expressing their thoughts in English, and therefore, were not able to express themselves in writing. The video portion of the presentation showed students working with tutors in English and when the students started to stumble or take long

periods thinking about how to best say what they meant, the tutor would tell the students, in their native language, that if they were having difficulties finding the words in English, they should explain it in their native tongue. The result: Each of the students was almost immediately able to explain to the tutor what he or she was trying to convey. From there the tutor was able to guide the student to the appropriate words in English.

The experiences in FIU's multilingual writing center show that allowing students to tutor and be tutored in their native tongues, when it is necessary to clarify meaning, has a major and positive influence on the students' experience and outcomes. In fact, one older Cuban national expressed his gratitude to the center for offering him an opportunity to clearly express his ideas in Spanish and he learned so much English vocabulary during the multilingual sessions that it made it easier for him to verbally express himself in English. Writing centers looking to internationalize should consider recruiting tutors from the regions hosting the international branch campuses. The intimate knowledge of the languages and the problems the tutors themselves faced when learning English, will make these tutors more sensitive to the struggles of the students and help them learn to express themselves clearly in English.

Recruiting students from the regions of the international campus being served is not to say that native-speaking tutors are somehow less equipped to tutor international students, but the native-speaking students recruited for international tutoring should be comprised of a more academically diversified group. Rather than focusing recruitment efforts on English majors and overworked departmental GTAs and grad students, writing center directors should be open to the possibility of recruiting less-than-perfect students who display the qualities leadership and compassion and, of course, a strong foundational

knowledge of writing. The reason for recruiting students who may or may not be “A students” or even the strongest writers can be found in the customer service aspects of the writing center. Students who show initiative, strong work ethics, and compassion in their classes are more suited for the business of tutoring than are students who have never known what it is to struggle through learning to write.

After trying to remove the immediate resistance to the idea of recruiting less-than-perfect students to tutor, consider the students who most need writing centers:

international and lower-level writers. Now consider the sense of hesitation a graduate student from China must feel when he or she has to seek-out tutoring to be taught to write fluently in English. These students are not by any means bad students, or bad writers, but the language barrier and conflicting rhetorical structures of China and the US combine to create the perfect storm of confusion and disappointment with paper grades.

Finally, consider the naturally talented writer. No one has ever had to explain to these students why a thesis statement comes at the beginning of a paper, or why all outside sources have to be properly cited, or even why a singular subject cannot be used with a plural verb. These students have never struggled their way through a paper, seeking help day after day, and revising until dawn. These ideal English majors, therefore, may not be the best tutors. Put simply, since no one has ever explained the “obvious” to them, how can these students possibly be expected to explain it to students? The “obvious” answer would be through training, but you cannot, regardless of how much you might want to, train someone to be empathetic to the struggles of international students. On the other hand, you can teach a student how to become a better writer, in turn also teaching them how to teach others to be better writers.

Training

Once tutors have been recruited for international online tutoring, there remains only the training process. Writing center scholars are in agreement that good training begins before tutors are put on the writing center floor and continues throughout their time in the writing center.³⁴ Some universities require a semester-long tutoring course, whereas others simply train for a set period of time before the center opens for regular business each semester, but regardless of the ways in which training is done every center tends to focus on the same aspects of tutoring. Tutors are trained to distinguish higher-order concerns from lower-order concerns, the various styles and formatting of academic writing, minimalistic tutoring techniques, and how to keep students engaged and take ownership of their writing. That being said, writing centers seeking to start international online tutoring services should consider adding more than technological training alone. The additional training requirements of the cultural expectations, educational practices, and contrastive rhetoric of each nation the tutors will be working with should also be considered, as well as designating tutors as on-campus and online, country specific tutors.

Cultural Expectations

Every person carries with them a set of culturally defined expectations of politeness, response to authority, gender roles, and promptness (Jandt 46). In fact, some would argue that very nearly every aspect of the human experience is based upon culturally defined expectations of society.³⁵ So it is not surprising that international students may have a very different expectation of the mannerisms and approaches of

³⁴ A compilation of training materials and best practice articles can be found on the Peer Tutoring Resource Center website, peertutoringresource.org.

³⁵ Peter Adler offers an analysis of this idea in his 1976 article "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism."

tutors than the American expectation. To avoid potential misunderstandings or unknown offenses, tutors who will be working online with international students should be trained in the cultural nuances of the tutees' countries.

Moving away from communication theory and into the writing center, Murriel Harris and Tony Silva touch on the importance of intercultural training for writing center tutors in their 1993 article "Tutoring ESL students: Issues and Options." Harris and Silva remind writing center directors that international students bring with them differing cultural constructs; for example, it is considered rude to hold direct eye contact for very long in some Asian collectivist cultures. Likewise, Latin and Hispanic cultures do not put much emphasis on promptness. Harris and Silva use generalized examples to show that the cultural constructs of international students play a large part in their focus in tutoring sessions and reactions to tutoring reminding tutors that if an ESOL student is focused only on LOCs that it is the tutors job to address these issues while remaining mindful of the larger HOCs (530). As ESOL student begin composing in English they will tend to get caught up in grammatical functions and errors, but the tutor should remind them that it is a long process to become fluent and the errors should be accepted and corrected: the most important part of writing is getting words on paper, only after thoughts are written down, can they be corrected.

Educational Practices

Aside from the cultural expectations of both the tutor and the student, it is important that tutors are trained to take into account the differences in educational practices when beginning to tutor ESOL students. The Anglophone classroom is now student-centered, meaning students work towards an answer and gain knowledge in the

process. In the student-centered classroom, students are not necessarily listening to lecture and taking notes to be tested on later; instead, students are working in groups, discussing problems, proposing solutions, and demonstrating knowledge through a final product. The pedagogical methods of Asian, African, and Middle-Eastern classrooms may be very different when compared to the methods of the UK, US, and Australia.

If Western pedagogical approaches are compared to those of China, for example, a very different view of the role of students in education emerges. Liu explores the pedagogical methods used in China saying that China and other Asian countries have “cultures with a long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority,” which results in the instructors being viewed as a “fount for knowledge delivered” (5). In other words, the traditional Asian classroom looks very different from a classroom in a US university. Students in China will sit quietly in rows, listen to lectures, and learn based on memorization of facts to be repeated during testing.

In tutoring the cultural differences in educational practices can play a major role. The same Chinese students sitting quietly memorizing rules will enter into online tutoring sessions expecting the tutor to expound knowledge and rules to correct the errors found. The autonomy and process of the Western views of education are as foreign to the students as the language, and it then becomes the job of the tutor to teach the student the expected behaviors during tutoring. Speaking from experience, the process of teaching international students the expected behaviors can take a long time. Although some students are receptive of the collaborative nature of writing center tutoring, some are not; the students who would appear to be non-receptive are, most often, simply confused as to the dynamic of the sessions.

In order to overcome the difficulties posed by differences in educational practices, tutors must be trained to maintain a non-hierarchical relationship with the students. The student should not feel as though the tutor is the “master” imparting infinite wisdom on the student; the student should see the tutor as a guide. Tutors can function as a guide in many ways: leading students to resources needed to complete assignments, nudging students towards expanding their previously held beliefs, and pushing students to push themselves in each new piece of writing. For the relational dynamic to occur naturally tutors must develop a close relationship with tutees and establish an environment of trust where students will comfortably express ideas both verbally and in writing.

Contrastive Rhetoric

The final aspect of ESOL tutoring that cannot be overlooked by directors seeking to develop international OWLs is sensitivity to the contrastive rhetoric of the cultures the tutors will be working with. Although there has been much debate in the past two decades about the generalizing and ethnocentric nature of traditional contrastive rhetoric, it is important for tutors to understand that students of different nationalities will compose under the influence of the prescribed rhetorical construction of their culture. Tutors must then be trained how to explain the differences without minimizing or discounting the value of the students’ native rhetorical constructions.

The bulk of contrastive rhetoric research labels the rhetorical construction of US universities as being linear, direct, deductive, and logical, as presented in John Hinds’s 1998 presentation at the Annual Convention on Teaching, and other languages’ rhetorical constructions have been described as indirect, “flowery,” or even circular. Connotations asides, the distinctive descriptions of each language, which can be found in length in

Connor's 1996 publication *Contrastive Rhetoric* paints a very different picture of the final papers produced by students. An American student will get to his or her point fairly quickly and follow that point with subpoints and evidence of the validity of the point. Hinds describes Japanese rhetoric very differently, however, saying that the construction is more or less "point-last"; in other words, students will offer evidence and give reasons for their claim before making a direct claim.

That is not to say of course, that one particular rhetorical construction is more or less correct, and in no way should tutors be trained to believe so, but the fact remains that students studying on international branch campuses are being awarded US accredited degrees and therefore must adhere to the rhetorical construction thought of as the standard in American academic English. The international OWL then has a responsibility to train tutors how to identify the rhetorical issues and explain to the student how to conform to American rhetorical standards.

Conclusion

Newer web-mediated collaborative technologies like video chat and file and screen sharing have opened a new avenue for online tutoring in writing centers requiring only minimal alterations to traditional writing center tenets. Furthermore, the development of international online sessions is now not only possible, but also brings with it an opportunity to expand cross-cultural tutor training. The types of students needed to conduct these sessions will also expand to include multilingual students while re-emphasizing the customer service aspects of the writing center and seeking tutors who are able to work well with others, understand the struggles of students and relate to their issues. This new class of tutors will be more culturally sensitive, well-rounded, and better

prepared to participate in the global economy after college after having the experience of working across international borders and using web-mediated collaboration technologies to complete tasks and teach others.

Chapter Seven: Recommendations

The current study examines the need for the development of real-time, interactive online tutorials for students attending international branch campuses of US universities. With 78 branch campuses hosted by 36 US universities in 29 countries, the estimated number of students attending US universities is estimated to be in the tens of thousands, and only a small number of host universities offer writing center services to these students. Of the 15 respondents to the Writing Center Prevalence and Practices survey, eight writing center directors are aware of writing center facilities and services offered by their international counterparts. Furthermore, only three of these host campuses actively coordinate with the writing center on international campuses, but seven of the responding directors say the OWL services are offered to the students on international campuses by the host campus. The survey results indicate that the seven host writing centers offering OWL services to international students provide tutoring support through email sessions, and six of the seven supplement email sessions with synchronous chat sessions.

Email and synchronous chat sessions are the most commonly used forms of OWL sessions, but each comes with an inherent set of difficulties. Email sessions do not allow for the tutor and tutee to discuss the paper and the corrections being recommended in real-time; instead, email sessions require that the student wait for the tutor to return the paper with comments. It is then the student's responsibility to schedule a follow up with the tutor through email or synchronous chat to receive any additional explanation of the comments. Through the lens of accepted minimalistic tutoring practices (Brooks) and ESOL tutoring expectations (Powers), email sessions provide the ideal environment for tutors to fall into the role of editor rather than tutor. Without active discussion of

students' writing and the intended meaning, it is difficult to correct errors in content and logic. Synchronous chat sessions also do not meet the standards of minimalistic and ESOL tutoring practices. For a chat session to be successful students must clearly identify the issues in their own writing and know how to articulate those concerns in writing when chatting with the tutor. The tutor and tutee are not able to look at the paper together at any time in neither email or chat sessions, making it nearly impossible to know if students have understood the tutors' advice and made the appropriate corrections without scheduling another email session. When all is said and done, email and chat mediated OWL sessions have the potential to take the time of two or more appointments for students to receive the feedback and suggestions that would have been provided in only one traditional writing center visit.

The increase in time invested and impersonal nature of email and chat sessions can be detrimental to ESOL students; however, the advances in online collaborative technologies offer writing centers the opportunity to develop web-mediated, face-to-face tutoring. Video chat, file and screen sharing, and online editing tool software provide the means for tutor and tutee to meet face-to-face virtually and discuss writing and see corrections made in real-time. The face-to-face experience of video chat contributes to building the tutor-tutee relationship, and therefore, to the success of writing center visits. File and screen sharing technologies now provide the means for both tutor and tutee to see, discuss, and correct mistakes during the live session; thus, additional sessions are not needed to address a single concern as the tutor is now able to immediately respond and direct students to the appropriate resources online. Tutors can use editing features to insert notes and comments directly onto student drafts, removing the need to check

written notes in a separate file while making corrections. Finally, the recording feature of video chat software makes reviewing sessions possible for tutors, administrators, and students alike. The ability to review recorded sessions helps to identify common issues to be addressed in continuous tutor training, and allows students to hear and see the tutor discussing the paper as they edit.

Online collaborative technologies have presented an opportunity to develop more comprehensive online writing center services to students across international borders. The implementation of these services, however, is bound to bring some difficulties. Just as is the case when putting any new online program into place, issues with technological failures, existing infrastructure, and division of cost will have to be addressed as they arise. Concerns about tutor and student computer competencies, lost or weak internet signals, and making the transition from traditional tutoring to online tutoring can easily be addressed with patience and training.

As a whole, the potential difficulties with implementing international OWL practices pale in comparison to the potential benefits not only to the students but also to the field of writing center studies. Using online collaboration technologies allows for tutors and directors to maintain the basic tenets of modern writing centers and better meet the needs of students on international campuses. Moreover, the training implications of these new online sessions will create tech-savvy, culturally sensitive tutors who are better suited to meet the demands of the globalizing economy.

Limitations

This research was not without its limitations including sample size, the availability of enrollment rate information, and an ambiguous survey question.

Sample Size

One limitation of the current study is the sample size ($n=15$) of participating writing center directors. The number of US universities with international branch campuses is, at this time, still limited. With only 34 universities with qualifying branch campuses and available contact information for the writing center directors at 25 of those 34, the potential sample size was small from the on-set. The survey did see a sixty percent response rate, but the potential sample size is simply too small to draw any statistically significant conclusions.

International Campus Enrollment Rates

The second major limitation of the current study is the fact that the number of students attending international branch campuses had to be estimated due to the fact that the appropriate university personnel holds a different title in different offices at each university. Moreover, the availability of statistics regarding program sizes on international branch campuses is limited and difficult to find. Less than half of the 34 universities with international branch campuses posts reports of student population in easily accessible locations online. Given the difficulties in identifying the appropriate contact person to gather information regarding the student populations on international branch campuses, and the time constraints for the project, it became necessary to estimate the number of students attending US campuses across the globe. In order to estimate the figures, therefore, I used the statistics readily available online for the universities that supplied such information and drew generalities based on the average enrollment rate.

Survey Question Number Five

Finally, the survey answers to question number five, “through which medium are online tutoring sessions usually offered?”, could be misleading given the slightly ambiguous nature of the question. The wording of the question does not implicitly require that the respondents identify the medium used for *international sessions*, simply which medium was used in the university’s OWL. Therefore, the answers to number five could include responses from writing center directors not currently offering OWL services to students on international campuses.

Future Research Implications

To determine the feasibility of real-time, interactive online tutorials across international borders, more research will need to be completed in international laws affecting the availability of internet access and services offered, a comparison of the US forms of international tutoring and the work being done to address second language issues in other countries exporting higher education like the UK, and an in-depth analysis of the benefits to ESOL students being tutored by native-speakers of English rather than by other ESOL students on their home campuses.

Perhaps one of the most immediate pieces of research needed before implementing international online writing center tutorials is an analysis of the national laws regarding free access to the internet and the services offered online. China, for example, has strict policies about the websites and services citizens can access online. While typically online educational services are not affected by these policies, for universities using Skype or other free access technologies the national policies about internet access could promote a problem. Therefore, a comprehensive overview of

international laws in the nations with the bulk of international branch campuses is necessary before schools begin to develop online services.

A secondary topic of interest may be a comparison of US writing tutoring methods, the writing center, and the methods used by other countries exporting higher education such as the UK. Tutoring practices may not translate from one country to the next and without an extensive review and comparison of each technique there is no definitive evidence that writing center practices are the best approach to enhancing ESOL writing competencies. That is not to say that writing center practices are ineffective, but rather that it is the responsibility of any higher education institution to ensure that students receive the most comprehensive educations available.

Finally, research in the benefits of ESOL students being tutored by native speakers is necessary to justify the need for international OWLs. It is a secondary option to export writing center services for universities hosting international branch campuses to open local centers on international campuses and hire student tutors, as it is done in the US. However, there are some inherent difficulties with implementing such a program; for instance, who will be selected to tutor and who will be responsible for the training of these tutors will be major points of contention. Moreover, the debate of whether or not a non-native speaker is able to understand the nuances of English well enough to teach other students will play a role in the decision of exporting tutoring or conducting international online sessions.

Recommendations

Universities with international branch campuses seeking to offer OWL services to students on international campuses should implement the use of online collaborative

technologies to best serve these international populations and train individual tutors to meet the needs of students in individual countries. Specializing tutors' cultural and rhetorical training will significantly help increase the outcomes of tutoring sessions.

After a writing center director identifies the best technologies for the purposes of the campus, the most important factor of international OWL sessions is the competence of tutors. Competence, here, is used not in the sense of writing proficiency or grammatical knowledge, but rather in the global sense. Tutors cannot hope to begin helping ESOL students on international branch campuses without first understanding the cultural practices, educational expectations, and rhetorical construction of the students' nation. It is for that reason that it is recommended that writing center directors select designated tutors for international sessions and ensure that each tutor conducting these sessions is thoroughly trained in the cultural and educational practices of that nation. This may mean that in a writing center serving two countries, China and Saudi Arabia, for instance, the director would recruit and train a finite number of tutors for each country. Preferably, these tutors would have minimal knowledge of the language of their respective countries, but more importantly, these tutors will be students who understand the struggles of composing while also showing a great aptitude for leadership and teaching.

The importance of leadership and understanding cannot be stressed enough in terms of international OWL sessions. The tutor-tutee relationship is based on trust, understanding, and the gentle persistence of the tutor. ESOL students in particular may take longer periods of time to open up to a tutor and really begin talking about their writing process, logic, and intention. With persistence, however, the tutor will find that

these sessions can be the most rewarding, once tutees are as invested as the tutor. The tutee must have a personal stake in his or her writing; the content must mean something more than simply a grade, and tutors cannot attempt to instill the idea of personal importance in tutees without the relationship that is fostered by face-to-face interpersonal interactions between two people over a period of time.

The potential to develop and maintain a meaningful interpersonal relationship with tutees is the greatest benefit of using online collaborative technologies for international online writing center sessions; the fact that writing center theory and pedagogy is not changed, and is, in fact, pushed forward by the use of these technologies is simply an added benefit. As education and business continue to globalize, students cannot ignore the value of intercultural understanding, as well as an understanding of current collaborative technologies. Offering interactive, real-time OWL services using online collaborative technologies is just one way to continue the development of students into globally minded, tech-savvy adults who are able to move beyond their own borders and participate in the global community, while offering tens of thousands of ESOL students on international branch campuses the invaluable resource of writing center tutoring.

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STUDY TITLE: [507251-1] "When Chat and Email are not enough: Developing Real-Time, Interactive, International Online Writing Center Tutorials"

IRB REFERENCE #: 14-053

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: February 5, 2014

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The departmental human subjects research committee and/or the Fort Hays State University IRB/IRB Administrator has determined that this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please note that any changes to this study may result in a change in exempt status. Any changes must be submitted to the IRB for review prior to implementation. In the event of a change, please follow the Instructions for Revisions at <http://www.fhsu.edu/academic/gradschl/irb/>.

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We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Exempt studies are not subject to continuing review.

If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Paige at lp Paige@fhsu.edu or 785-628-4349. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.