

## Writing Center Consultants Share Insights at RMWCA Conference

Last month, seven writing consultants presented at the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association's annual conference, and their work offers a glimpse into the curiosity and sustained inquiry that have characterized consultants' work in the University Writing Center over the past year.

At RMWCA, consultants' presentations ranged from emphasizing "the necessity of reconsidering silence in conversations around marginalization and inclusion" (Wendy Chen, PhD program in English) to offering strategies for consultants to manage the specific anxieties that can accompany working in Zoom (Kayla Deep, MSW program) to exploring the potential benefits of disfluency in consultations (Julia Cordova, senior Political Science major and writing minor).

These seven consultants are carrying on a longstanding tradition in our writing center of sharing their insights, narratives, and research at regional and national conferences and in writing studies publications. Their work helps everyone on our staff to remain current with writing center theory and practice, to contribute actively to conversations in the field, and to help writers at DU to be thoughtful and intentional about their own writing.

Writing Center consultants who presented at the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Annual Conference 2021:



### **Ben Caldwell, English & Literary Arts PhD, "Your (Not Actually) Cheating Heart: Understandings of Plagiarism in a Primarily Online Professional Graduate Program"**

Much of what we call "plagiarism" at a university may be better understood as teachable moments, errors rather than moral failings, and writing centers are uniquely poised to challenge this understanding. This roundtable discussion will provide an overview of survey research comparing the understandings of

plagiarism among faculty members and students in university/college programs, specifically to identify attitudes toward plagiarism. Participants will participate in the survey to better understand their own attitudes and engage in discussions about how tutors can navigate these consultations to shift them toward learning opportunities for students.

**Wendy Chen, English & Literary Arts PhD,  
“The Rhetorics of Silence in the Writing  
Center”**

For people of color, silence frequently renders them invisible to the white gaze. For a white audience, silent bodies of color are subjugated bodies, filled not with implication or meaning, but rather blankness and emptiness. This session encourages tutors to consciously reframe and reconsider the role of silence within the space of the writing center and consultation. After establishing the absence of silence in writing center scholarship, the presenter will examine the role of silence as an imposed position and/or rhetorical choice. Participants will be empowered to use silence in new ways within their sessions, as well as realize the necessity of reconsidering silence in conversations around marginalization and inclusion.



**Julia Cordova, Political Science and  
Writing, “Breaking Up is Not Hard  
to Do: The Overlooked Benefits of  
Disfluency Within Writing Centers”**

Writing scholars have long studied the positive impacts of environmental schema and routines have on writers and their writing processes. However, by focusing only on the writing process as a routine, many studies overlook the art of

“disfluency”—the positive impact of purposeful disruption within the writing process. Participants will learn how practicing disfluency within writing center consultations can foster confidence-building communities where writers can reflect on their acquired skills and make connections with their past and future experiences.

**Kayla Deep, MSW, “Pausing for Breath:  
Minimizing Writing-Induced Anxiety in the  
Writing Center”**

Breath work can be impactful in the writing center space, and acknowledging the anxiety common in the writing process can benefit both writer and consultant. In this interactive presentation, participants will be led through a breath exercise, introduced to a study gathering data on writer/consultant anxiety, and discuss the benefits of breath work in writing center spaces. Participants will learn how tutors might broach the topic of wellness in inviting and un-intimidating ways and discuss the anxiety we encounter as consultants and how wellness exercises



may assist us in our work. This interactive presentation provides resources for tutors working with anxious writers.



**George Kovalenko, Creative Writing PhD, “Uncentering the Writing Center”**

To write, talk, listen—we are told, as tutors—are positive actions. Through these actions, the tutor and the writer purportedly construct a positive space, in which the site of the writing center maintains its activity. This presentation will challenge this idea by arguing that writing and tutoring, as modes of alienated institutional labor and of vital aesthetic,

intellectual, and phenomenological engagement, are neither a theoretical pursuit nor a mode of doing. Participants will discuss questions about the ways in which we engage in our own tutorial labor as a given activity in a site.

**Kristen Wallace, English MA, “Talking in Turn: An Exploration of Writing Center Consultant Disclosure”**

Writing centers, whether virtual or in-person, are places where writers share the often deeply personal work that they have done; as consultants, we tout these spaces as comfortable and do our best to make them so. Because virtual synchronous meetings are at once more personal (we immediately disclose personal elements like our home spaces) and less personal (we cannot share a physical document or read body language cues as effectively), our conversations and perceptions of mutual vulnerability become more pressing. This presentation will present survey results regarding how consultants define disclosure in their writing sessions and discussions of how these definitions intersect with peerness and authority.



**Dave Whelan, Creative Writing PhD, “Witnessing as Radical Empathy in Tutorials”**

The academy is altering faster than ever before – through universal social movements to vital social-distancing practices – and the traditional boundaries of space have begun to dissolve. The role of the tutor, therefore, is no longer one merely rooted to a singular space: we are now accessible from wherever we have the internet, and this abstraction from face-to-face to screen-to-screen has altered our relationship to the

emotional work of the tutorial. This interactive presentation will examine what we mean by radical empathy in 2021. Participants will explore how we help ourselves to find new connections in our methodologies in relation to our students, so that we can better help them?