**Mapping Support for Diversity**
**Through Writing Center Administration**

**International Writing Centers Association 2008 Conference**
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Tammy Conard-Salvo, Purdue University [tcsalvo@purdue.edu]
Joy Santee, Purdue University [jsantee@purdue.edu]
Richard Sévère, Purdue University [rsevere@purdue.edu]

**Workshop Description**

This workshop explores how issues of diversity impact and shape writing center administration, specifically through tutor recruitment, tutor training, and policy development. The session focuses on a broad definition of diversity—including, but not limited to, race and culture, gender, sexuality, linguistics, age, and dis/ability. Attendees will draft an action plan that will make their writing centers better equipped to foster diversity and acceptance.

**Workshop Agenda**

Introduction/definitions ................................................................. 10 minutes
Responding to Scenarios
(Small groups) ............................................................................. 10 minutes
(Large group) ................................................................................. 15 minutes
Strategies and Resources ............................................................... 10 minutes
Creating an Action Plan ................................................................. 15 minutes
Q&A .............................................................................................. 15 minutes
Types of Diversity

We provide the following descriptions of diversity to peer tutors-in-training on our campus:

Language
When you think of differences in language and linguistic diversity, you might immediately think about the differences between native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English. You might also think about non-native English speaker’s first or home languages, and at many campuses, you might hear half a dozen different languages that are spoken just as you walk from class to class. However, linguistic diversity can also include various dialects of English within the United States and elsewhere, such as the UK and Australia. It may include different accents as well as different idiomatic expressions or vocabulary words, even within the same language. You can learn more information about language diversity in the U.S. by visiting the Language Diversity website at http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/AAVE/coalition/.

Ethnicity, Culture, and Race
Differences in ethnicity, culture, and race are sometimes the most apparent and are the ones most considered when thinking about diversity. Each person comes from a particular culture or ethnic background that includes ancestry, tradition, country of origin, values and mores, and other factors.

Race, on the other hand, refers to differences in skin color, and race may or may not be related to ethnicity or culture. In other words, a person’s racial background is not always indicative of the culture to which he or she belongs, especially in the United States where multiple races and multiple cultures have existed for generations.

Geography and Region
In addition to one’s culture or ethnicity, there are differences in what region a person is from. This may include whether someone is from an urban, suburban, or rural environment. You might notice differences among various regions within Indiana or even the Midwest. If you’re from a small, farming community, your hometown would be different from a town like Chicago or New York. Geography and region can have an impact on linguistic diversity, as mentioned above.

Socioeconomic Class
Socioeconomic class—whether a person is considered poor, working class, middle class, upper middle class, wealthy, or some other variation—might not immediately come to mind with regard to diversity. However, differences, as well as stereotypes and discrimination, do exist with regard to monetary income and status associated with income.

Age
It may surprise you to know that not all freshman students are 17 or 18-year olds who enter college straight out of high school. In fact, some students begin their educations after taking time to work, to raise families, or to complete military service. Writing Lab clients include students at various age levels, whether they are “non-traditional” undergraduate students or whether they are graduate students who are already in a profession.
Gender
Gender differences may appear to be obvious from a physiological standpoint, but it is important to note that gender is one area in which discrimination and stereotypes still exist. In the Writing Lab, gender issues may come into play during tutorial sessions because of stereotypes or differences in cultural values—i.e. how someone in a particular culture is taught to perceive men and women and how they should, or shouldn’t, interact. Some research from writing center scholars and even from some tutors in the Writing Lab suggests that gender may have an effect on interactions within tutorial sessions.

Sexuality
Differences in sexuality focus on a person’s sexual orientation—whether they are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, intersex or transgender. Sexuality is a politically controversial topic, and tempers may flare when people discuss issues about homosexuality and heterosexuality. Students in first year composition may choose to write about issues of sexuality for their class assignments, or their instructors may prohibit such topics due to their controversial nature. As a tutor, you should avoid the temptation to confront a student with your own opinion on the subject of sexuality. Instead, help the student focus on rhetorical issues, regardless of the argument and topic.

Learning Styles
As you already know, people can learn in a variety of different ways: visual, kinesthetic, and auditory, or a combination of the three. You know, too, that individuals have different writing styles or approach the writing process in different ways. According to Howard Gardner, who developed a theory of multiple intelligences, human potential exists in eight different ways, which can account for the variety of interests and strengths that we all have.

(Dis)Ability
In an earlier unit, we discussed ways of working with students with disabilities. These disabilities can be physical or cognitive, and in the Writing Lab, we work to accommodate any student who might need assistance in getting the same educational opportunities as any other student.

Religion
As you know, religious beliefs and backgrounds vary from individual to individual and are not always limited to geography, ethnicity, or culture. Differences and variations exist even within a particular religion, and you will find that even individuals who share a religion may not share the same beliefs. As with any type of difference, one should avoid religious stereotypes, but even more important is to avoid privileging one religion or assuming that everyone shares the same religion.

Thought and Ideology
Thought and ideology may or may not be related to religion, morals, or philosophy. We all have beliefs and opinions on a variety of issues and topics, and you may encounter a vast array of thoughts and ideologies in the Writing Lab. This may include differences in political ideologies within the U.S. and elsewhere, from capitalism to socialism. Or liberal versus conservative and anything in-between.
SCENARIOS

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

1. Tutors in your writing center have been working with a student with a learning disability for a few months. On occasion, the student’s mother has called to check on her daughter’s progress. Since that information is protected by FERPA, you have always (nicely) told the mother that you are unable to share that information with her. Now the mother has appeared in your writing center with her daughter to observe the daughter’s tutoring session. What do you do?

2. You overhear a student trying to make an appointment for a tutorial session. The student, who is a non-native speaker of English, has specifically requested that he work with an “American” tutor. Do you intervene? Why or why not?

3. Your institution has recently added an adult education program that targets working adults and offers classes on evenings and weekends. The institution also has a required writing exam, which a number of the students do not pass on their first attempt. Before they can retake the exam, the students are required to undergo a significant amount of tutoring with the writing center, but many of them are having difficulty finding time to come in during the day when your center is open. Some students are taking time off work and then requesting two and even three hour tutoring sessions to complete the required tutoring during the time they have taken off work. The students are asking you to offer evening hours, but money is tight. What steps can you as an administrator take to begin to serve this student population effectively?

4. A student stops by your writing center to make an appointment for a tutorial session. The student, who appears to be an international student from an Asian country, specifically requests that her tutor not be a Black male because she is afraid based on what she sees on television. How do you acknowledge the student’s fears while maintaining an inclusive environment in your writing center?

5. A student who uses a wheelchair arrives for her tutorial appointment. You have space limitations in your writing center. The front desk is located very close to the front door, and the waiting area is very small. The tutorial tables are very close together, making it difficult for the student to maneuver in her wheelchair. Furthermore, when she is able to make it to the table where she and her tutor will work, it becomes apparent that the table’s height prevents her from sitting closely enough to engage in the tutorial session. How do you accommodate the student during this tutorial appointment and how do you address the issue of space in general when working with students with disabilities?
TUTOR TRAINING

1. A student comes into the writing center to get assistance on a reflective essay for a class. In the document the student reveals that s/he is openly gay. Through body language, it is obvious that the tutor has a different view on sexuality and is uncomfortable working with the student and the document. The tutor’s discomfort thus makes the student feel self-conscious. How does a Writing Center administrator address issues of sexuality when it comes to tutor training? What happens when the roles are reversed and the tutor self identifies as homosexual and the tutee feels uncomfortable working with him/her? Most importantly, what role does sexuality play in fostering a diverse population in Writing Centers?

2. An adult education program is raising tutor training issues in your writing center as your center’s clientele shifts toward this new population at your institution. Your young undergraduate tutors have expressed concern about their ability to tutor students as old as their parents. You assure them that you are confident in their abilities to tutor this population, but some remain visibly uncomfortable with tutoring non-traditional students. How do you address the situation?

3. One of your tutors works with a non-native English speaking student who is writing a research paper. The tutors tries to tell the student that she needs to explain the significance of the quotes she is using, but she does not seem to understand, and keeps saying phrases such as, “But I don’t know what to write here” or “What do I put here?” How can your tutors help the student more effectively without doing the student’s work?

4. A tutor is leading a conversation group for ESL students. One of the students says he was watching television on a previous evening and wanted to know what it meant to “get to third base” and also what it meant to “hit a home run.” The tutor begins to explain the rules of baseball when the student interrupts, “I’m pretty sure it doesn’t refer to baseball.” How can your tutors address American cultural issues and idiomatic phrases like these?

TUTOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

1. Currently, you have 12 tutors, 2 of whom are male and 10 of whom are female. All of your peer tutors are English majors. You are in the process of recruiting new peer tutors for the following semester and have been looking for ways of attracting a more diverse tutoring staff, including recruiting students from other departments. What sorts of recruitment initiatives can you take to diversify your tutoring staff?

2. You have a tutor on your staff who is the only person from his ethnic group represented in the writing center. He tells you that he is not returning the following semester because he is too busy, and you later hear from another tutor that he was uncomfortable being the only minority tutor on staff. Do you contact the former tutor for more information? How can you create an environment where all tutors, especially those from underrepresented groups, feel more comfortable?
Selected Resources

The following list of resources is intended to help administrators begin investigating resources on issues of diversity. While we tried to include a variety of books, articles, and websites, the list is by no means exhaustive.


*Do You Speak American?: Language Diversity Website.* <http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/>


*Project Implicit.* <http://projectimplicit.net/>


CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. What issues do you need to address to help you writing center support the diversity of your particular campus?
2. What are your short term and long term goals? What is realistic and in what time frame?
3. What type of budget does your facility have available for making changes?
4. What type of training, if any, would be involved? Who would facilitate this training?
5. What additional resources are available?
6. Can you collaborate with anyone on campus to achieve your goals?

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

| **Issue:** Making the space more accessible |
| **Short term goal:** making it possible for students with disabilities to use our facilities, opening up the space so that maneuverability is not an issue, rearranging the furniture (time frame: 1 semester) |
| **Long-term goal:** find furniture that is accessible and add technology that might assist in tutorials |
| **Budget:** rearranging space is free, but purchasing furniture and equipment costs more money than the budget allows |
| **Training:** Ask someone from adaptive programs to facilitate a workshop for tutors |
| **Resources:** Talk with a department head about disability compliance. Can someone on campus do an assessment of the space? What grants are available? |
| **Collaborate:** Contact disability resources office! |
YOUR ACTION PLAN!

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Issue:

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Short term goal:

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Long-term goal:

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Budget:

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Training:

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Resources:

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Collaborate:

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