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## From the Editors

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## From the Editors

*Albert C. DeCiccio and Joan Mullin*

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In this issue, authors turn to history, popular culture, and common assumptions about writing centers in order to better define who we are and how we conduct our daily business. Faigley calls on the “[m]etaphors of chaos and whitewater” in popular books on business to illustrate how economic conditions drive education’s choices today. Faigley encourages writing centers, with their ability to respond quickly to changing environments, to take leadership roles in education. Just as we do in our tutorials, we must “scout what lies ahead” in our institutions instead of solidifying our positions in academic structures that are already doomed. Like Faigley, Lynn Briggs points to a trend in popular literature, and she too risks using a personal story to look at larger issues of our practice. Drawing on perhaps the most controversial research in this issue, Briggs composes a contemporary definition of “spiritual” to explain that indefinable moment of connection in our collaborative sessions and suggests how we might encourage their occurrence. Her research touches on other educators’ calls for addressing the “whole” student, a philosophy and pedagogy we claim as central to our work. But, asks Sibylle Gruber’s article, where is the line between tutoring the whole student and interfering with their choices? Gruber’s examination of plagiarism raises the complementary issues of faculty-tutor collaboration and tutor-writer confidentiality. The incident about which she writes also reminds us to be mindful of the motives, assumptions, and personal histories which comprise our expectations and direct our actions as tutors, teachers, and writers.

The remaining two articles look at how important it is that we continually reflect on how we interpret and enact our theories. Sharon Thomas, Danielle DeVoss, and Mark Hara launched into cyber tutoring, and then had the sense to stop and ask the right questions about the change it brought to their practice. Rather than ignore the importance of technology because of their discomfort, this writing center staff chose to change the perception faculty and students hold about technology, keeping pace with changing times on their campus while maintaining the integrity of their writing center philosophy.

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The nexus of writing center work that disturbed Thomas, DeVoss, and Hara is the subject of the article by Susan Blau, John Hall, and Tracy Strauss. By looking closely at tutorial conversations, these authors found a need for us to reconsider our use of “non-directive.” Their work begins to map out for us the fine lines tutors walk between teaching and collaborating. Questioning our use of each may help us understand how best we work in any environment—face to face or in cyberspace—and provides a research method that can serve us well in other writing center studies.

Barbara Roswell asks us to recall our histories, too, in her review of *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* by Jane Tompkins. While she applauds Tompkins’ call for a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, she also asks us to remind ourselves and others, like Tompkins, of how we’ve been doing as much in the writing center for many years. Finally, it is difficult not to be biased about *The Writing Center Resource Manual*; to ensure some objectivity, we’ve asked a veteran writing center director and a person new to writing centers to determine how useful it could be for those of us in either category. For those steeped in writing center culture for years, it is sometimes difficult to remember what folks new to our profession may need. Our histories sometimes blind us to the changes we need to make as the culture around us shifts. That brings us to one thread that weaves itself throughout this issue: those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it.

Each of our authors examines a piece of their history—personal or professional—in order to create a clear picture of their present. Only by closely examining through our research what is actually taking place in our centers—rather than constructing our realities out of assumptions—can we remain the fluid, responsive centers for learning that we claim to be. We hope these articles help all of us reconsider our personal assumptions, our writing center philosophy and pedagogy, so that we can continue to serve writers productively while we ourselves grow personally and professionally.