



Candis Bond

# “I Need Help on Many Things Please”: A Case Study Analysis of First-Generation College Students’ Use of the Writing Center

---

## Abstract

First-generation college students (FGCS) are a growing student population in the United States. Because of the barriers they face, these students are more likely to drop out or fall behind than are their multigenerational peers. This article presents the results of a case study on FGCS and their use of the writing center conducted at a midsized, southeastern, public university. The study analyzed the WCOOnline appointment and consultation report forms of self-identified FGCS and multigeneration college students (MGCS) who used the writing center in order to learn more about the needs, perceptions, and experiences of FGCS as writers. Results indicate FGCS’ appointments cover more ground, use more directive approaches, are more likely to include negative language and emotional affect, and focus on global concerns and genre/rhetorical knowledge at more frequent rates than do MGCS’ appointments. Based on results, recommendations for improving writing support for FGCS and further research are made.



Writing for college is inherently academic and social. All students must manage the demands of coursework while simultaneously navigating aspects of their identities engaged—or perhaps challenged or dismissed—during the writing process. This negotiation can be especially difficult for first-generation college students (FGCS). Although they form a heterogeneous student population, first-generation college students share many traits<sup>1</sup> and are distinct in their role as “educational pioneers” (London, 1996, p. 11). In this role, they often find themselves struggling to perform academically and to adjust socially in college due to a lack of preparation for college coursework and of social capital.<sup>2</sup> First-generation students’ anxieties about identity politics, shifting value systems, barriers to success, and a lack of social capital can manifest in their perceptions and experiences of academic writing (Davis, 2010; Jenkins, Belanger, Londono-Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013; Peckham, 2010). In his book-length study on social class and writing instruction in the United States, Irvin Peckham (2010) argues that writing in the university can be used as a “way of sorting people” and “institutionalizing failure” for working-class students, making the act of writing especially fraught for FGCS, many of whom are also

---

1 FGCS are more likely to come from working-class, low-income backgrounds; identify as racial or ethnic minorities; be older than traditional students; enroll in developmental classes, also known as “remedial” courses; be multilingual; enroll at two-year colleges and certification programs more frequently than at four-year institutions, even though they are likely to have greater success at the latter; and have less knowledge and confidence about college (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016; Redford, Mulvaney, & Ralph 2017; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport 2012). FGCS are also more likely to live at home rather than on campus, have family responsibilities, and work multiple jobs during their college careers, juggling multiple roles and demands on their time while in college (Balemián & Feng, 2013). In fact, the most frequently cited reasons FGCS do not matriculate from college are inability to afford college and changes in family status (Redford, Mulvaney, & Ralph 2017). Many FGCS work more than 20 hours per week, further contributing to struggles with time management (Balemián & Feng, 2013; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

2 As a group, FGCS tend to be less academically prepared for college than are multigenerational college students, with lower skills in reading, math, and critical thinking. These students also have lower cumulative GPAs when applying for college admission, take the ACT/SAT later and at lower rates, take fewer AP courses and exams, and take a less rigorous high-school curriculum overall (Choy, 2001; Redford, Mulvaney, & Ralph, 2017; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). In combination with other markers such as income level and minority status, a lack of social capital has been identified as a key factor contributing to the high attrition rates and lower rates of retention and progression among FGCS in postsecondary settings (Balemián & Feng, 2013; Brown, Hurst, & Hail, 2016; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008; London, 1992; Oldfield, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Purswell, Yazedjian, & Toews, 2008; Sundburg, 2007; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

low-income (p. 2). In the process of navigating the social, political, and academic demands of college writing, many FGCS end up visiting university writing centers, yet writing center professionals know very little about FGCS' expectations for and experiences of writing center support.

In *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring* (2010), Harry Denny argues that for FGCS, “the phenomenon of face or identity literally comes to the front in the writing center” (p. 23). He explains,

For students whose cultural capital doesn't neighbor the mainstream, they encounter a learning situation fraught with complexity: Do they surrender their code for another alien one? Do they resist and face the material and symbolic consequences of not fitting in? Do they negotiate some sort of middle ground? How might they subvert all these confining possibilities? (p. 23)

As sites on college campuses that promote inclusivity, student success, and community while simultaneously being complicit in the upholding of what Denny (2010) calls the “middle-class values” of composition (p. 74), writing centers sit on tenuous ground, often serving as both gateways and gatekeepers for FGCS looking to succeed. As an FGCS myself, I experienced the ambiguity of the writing center Denny describes so well. While I generally saw the center at my undergraduate institution as a good thing, I also avoided it out of fear that I might not be welcome or that my professors might see me as an outsider unable to meet their expectations without supplemental instruction. As I began working in writing centers as a consultant and then director, I often wondered whether I was becoming complicit in a system that silenced students like myself—was I working to maintain the status quo? Or was I reshaping the centers in which I worked to better support FGCS? As I struggled with these questions, I realized more research was needed to better understand how FGCS actually use and experience writing centers. As Denny, John Nordlof, & Lori Salem (2018) point out in their recent study of working-class students' perceptions and expectations of writing centers, FGCS have been understudied within the context of writing center scholarship despite a long history of serving them. Denny, Nordlof, & Salem (2018) suggest this omission is not accidental: the very existence of writing centers is, in large part, due to first-generation and low-income students' enrollment in college; yet, for most of writing center history, this connection has been minimized lest centers appear remedial, losing their academic standing (p. 72–73; Denny, 2010, pp. 63–64). If this is the case, then more research on FGCS is needed not only to address a gap in knowledge but also to reevaluate writing center pedagogy and lore—what Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2013) calls “the grand narrative” of writing center work (p. 3). Conducting more

research on FGCS and writing centers can add to the network of stories that make up our practice while also interrogating the idea that centers are equally accessible, welcoming, and supportive of *all* students.

In order to learn more about the experiences and needs of FGCS, I conducted a mixed-methods case study focused on FGCS' use of the writing center I direct at Augusta University, a midsized public research institution in the Southeast. Using grounded theory and open coding, I analyzed the WCOOnline appointment and consultation report forms of self-identified FGCS and multigeneration college students (MGCS) to answer several questions about the writing center experiences of FGCS, including, What types of assistance do FGCS seek when they visit the writing center? What types of support are they most likely to receive from writing consultants? How does writing center pedagogy and training influence the types of support consultants provide FGCS? How do the requests of FGCS and the feedback they receive compare to those of MGCS visiting the writing center? How do consultants and FGCS negotiate authority during consultations? How might the experience of FGCS in the writing center affect their transition into college as they navigate new roles and unfamiliar expectations?

Results of the study revealed key differences between the writing consultations of FGCS and MGCS: FGCS' appointments covered more ground across stages of the writing process, used more directive approaches, were more likely to include negative language and emotional affect, and focused on global concerns and genre/rhetorical knowledge at more frequent rates than MGCS' appointments. These results suggest that if writing centers want to support FGCS in college, then writing center scholars and practitioners must continue to rethink some of the basic principles embedded in our practice and training, including the linear model of composing; categorical hierarchies of global/local; the directive/nondirective continuum; and the idea of the center as a welcoming, safe space. Because of its design as a case study, the results of my research are limited in scope and not generalizable to other institutions.<sup>3</sup> However, my findings do provide insight into FGCS' perceptions and uses of writing centers that can add to the conversation about how best to support this growing student population.<sup>4</sup>

---

3 At the time of data collection, Augusta University served primarily white, middle-class students from the state of Georgia, with first-generation students making up between 10% and 15% of the total undergraduate population. Because of this rather monolithic student body, my research serves as a case study, as results cannot be representative of wider, more diverse enrollments.

4 The number of FGCS enrolled in undergraduate programs has continued to increase over the last decade, with FGCS currently making up somewhere between 25% and

## Searching for Stories, Recounting Voices: Methods and Analysis

I collected data by analyzing FGCS' writing center appointment forms and comparing them with writing consultants' correlating client-report forms taken from the scheduling software WOnline.<sup>5</sup> Data collected were created prior to my arrival as director of the writing center at my university, making my knowledge of writers and consultants minimal; consequently, I myself de-identified data prior to comparing FGCS' self-expressed needs to the observations, advice, and comments of the consultants in their follow-up client reports.<sup>6</sup> I chose grounded-theory methodology and open coding so that meaning was derived from my local "community of practice" (p. 19), to use Mark Hall's (2017) words. This methodology creates theory that "fits" and "works" within local contexts, rather than generating theory "by logical deduction from *a priori* assumptions" (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 3). When coding, I started without a clear purpose or research question, allowing patterns to emerge from the data itself. As a pilot case study, this research generates hypotheses and critical questions about FGCS' use of writing centers that can be used to inform future investigations. This study's design can be replicated at other institutions and/or modified to support a larger, cross-institutional future study on the use of writing centers by FGCS.

The study sample included FGCS and a control group of randomly selected MGCS. To select my FGCS sample, I limited my study to students who self-identified as first generation on admissions/enrollment forms in fall 2015, the year my institution began tracking this information this way.<sup>7</sup> This limit created an initial sample of 244 students. I looked up each

---

50% of college enrollments, depending on location, age of the student, and how the status is defined (U. S. Department of Education & NCES, 2014).

- 5 Since data used in this study were pulled from existing semipublic files and all information was de-identified, the university's Internal Review Board Committee B: Social and Behavioral Research approved it under the classification of "exempt" (study # 1107769-1).
- 6 If other institutions choose to replicate this study, I recommend having additional personnel do two tasks: de-identify the data prior to analysis by the primary researcher(s) in order to reduce potential bias and assist with coding to ensure intercoder reliability.
- 7 It is important to note that definitions of *first generation* can vary depending on context. The term *first generation* most frequently refers to a student whose parents did not obtain a baccalaureate degree or a student whose parents did not attend a postsecondary institution. Ward, Siegel, & Davenport (2012) discuss the history of these two definitions. They point out that TRiO, the first federal educational program directed at recruiting and retaining FGCS in higher education after the

of these students' names in our WCOOnline client records to see if these students had registered for a writing center account. This yielded a sample of 47 students. I then limited the sample to self-identified first-generation students who had made writing-consultation appointments between January 1, 2015, and August 1, 2016,<sup>8</sup> resulting in 42 students who made a total of 108 writing center appointments. To form my control group, I randomly selected 42 MGCS drawn from a complete list of writing center clients with appointments made between January 1, 2015, and August 1, 2016. I omitted students who self-identified as FGCS on university admissions forms in 2015 from this list prior to random sampling. For the sample of MGCS, I again included appointment and client-report forms dated between January 1, 2015, and August 1, 2016. This sample did not yield as many appointments as my FGCS sample of 42 students, so I continued to add randomized students until I had a comparable number of appointments. My sample of MGCS included 52 students who made 108 appointments. As mentioned previously, the small sample size and setting limit the generalizability of results; however, the sample size did provide insight into the needs and perceptions of FGCS, as well as into consultants' perceptions of these students.

Since I compared students' appointment forms with consultants' report forms, it is also important to note that reports written by 15 undergraduate peer consultants (7 men, 8 women) were included in data analysis. None of these consultants identified as FGCS on 2015/2016 enrollment forms. The consultants were not informed of this study, nor would they have any way of knowing the FGCS status of their consultees, as these data are not made public by the university and were not collected on client profiles in WCOOnline at the time of data collection. Thus, the trends that emerged when analyzing the data suggest unconscious biases or attitudes toward FGCS rather than intentional practices or prejudices.

---

implementation of the Higher Education Act in the 1960s, defined the term as "all students whose parents have not obtained a postsecondary degree" (p. 4). However, since then, some institutions and studies have used a more restricted definition of parents not having attended college at all. Ward, Siegel, & Davenport argue that the latter definition is more appropriate for designing support services for FGCS, as a lack of knowledge about college sets FGCS apart from other populations. Students whose parents attended a postsecondary institution but who did not matriculate may have institutional knowledge to pass on to their children, offsetting some of the barriers they face. While I agree with Ward, Siegel, & Davenport's assessment, this article uses the following definition of *first generation*, taken from the author's home institution's "First Generation Survey": "students who are the first in their families who plan to pursue and receive a college degree" (Augusta University, 2018).

8 After this date, my center changed the design of its appointment forms, so all subsequent appointments were excluded from the study.

While this can be a limitation of the study, consultants' lack of knowledge about the FGCS status can also be useful for seeing how, even at the unconscious level, consulting practices and writing center pedagogy can influence sessions and writer/consultant perceptions. Additionally, data used in the study were entered into WCOonline prior to my arrival at this university, so I was not involved with any of the sessions analyzed. I was also not involved in the training of these consultants, although each took a one-credit consultant-training course with a previous director that emphasized instruction in grammar and citation styles, the prioritization of global over local concerns, and professionalization.

Upon initial review, all forms (N= 330) were analyzed for recurring terms and practices. I identified 25 terms and practices (see the appendix for a comprehensive coding key with examples of each term/practice). Using the key included in the appendix, I coded all writers' appointment forms and available corresponding consultant report forms. In total, 108 FGCS' appointment forms, 52 corresponding FGCS' consultation reports, 108 MGCS' appointment forms, and 62 corresponding MGCS' consultation reports were included in data collection and analysis. I frequently assigned multiple codes to forms since single sessions often focused on more than one issue; however, I did not assign the same code more than once to a single form, even if a writer or consultant mentioned the same issue more than once. I left passages that did not fit into recurring patterns uncoded. Thus, numbers reported refer to the issues focused upon during a single session (or the frequency with which consultations focus upon certain issues), not to the frequency with which writers and/or consultants mentioned certain terms. In order to add to my understanding of trends in FGCS' appointments, after the initial round of coding, I grouped codes together into three broader categories: local concerns, global concerns, and genre/rhetorical knowledge.

Appointment forms without corresponding consultation forms were included in the sample, which meant that, although my sample included an equal number of writers' appointment forms—108 for both FGCS and MGCS—the number of available corresponding consultation report forms varied in each group. Therefore, I also used standard rates to allow for comparison among groups. Rates refer to the frequency of a code per 100 appointments across groups. I used the term *rate difference* to denote differences between the number of times a writer used a code and the number of times a consultant used the same code per sample group. For example, if FGCS requested help with citations at a rate of 13 times per 100 appointments, but consultants reported helping FGCS with citations at a rate of only 10 times per 100 appointments, there would be a rate difference of -3. On the contrary, if a consultant reported a code more

frequently than it was requested by a writer, the rate difference would be denoted by a + symbol.

Since sample size for MGCS was not statistically significant in this study, comparing rate differences across sample groups does not offer generalizable results. However, the rate differences are useful starting points for thinking about discrepancies in what writers want/need when they come to the center and the support they receive; rate differences also provide insight, if only on a case-study basis, into potential differences in types of support provided to FGCS and MGCS. Since my center is small and held fewer than 2,000 annual appointments total during the time of data collection, the rates presented begin to tell a story about the types of support offered to different student populations. In addition to quantifying qualitative data via coding and rates, in the results I include key qualitative data from forms in order to complement and contextualize quantitative findings.

### **“I Would Like to Work on the Mistakes That Were Made”: What Happens when FGCS Visit the Writing Center?**

In order to understand how FGCS and MGCS were using the writing center, I compiled coded data into tables (see Tables 1 and 2 below). These tables outline the rates at which FGCS and MGCS asked for help with particular areas of writing, as well as the rates at which writing consultants focused on similar concerns. Rate differences were also included in order to show the frequency with which consultants focused on writers' concerns or deviated from them.

**Table 1***FGCS' Use of Writing Center: Results of Initial Coding*

Category	Code	FGCS Appt. Forms (n=108)/ Rate	FGCS Report Forms (n=52)/Rate	Rate Difference
Help	1	13/12	7/13.46	+1.46
Understand	2	2/1.85	2/3.84	+1.99
Sentence-level issues	3	34/31.48	24/46.15	+14.67
Revise	4	19/17.59	5/9.61	-7.98
Fix	5	1/0.92	1/1.92	+1
Analyze	6	1/0.92	7/13.46	+12.54
Edit	7	30/29.62	1/1.92	-27.70
Organization	8	21/19.44	19/36.53	+17.09
Flow	9	5/4.62	3/5.76	+1.14
Thesis	10	6/5.55	11/21.15	+15.60
Introduction	11	5/4.62	2/3.84	-0.78
Conclusion	12	1/0.92	1/1.92	+1
Prompt	13	2/1.85	5/9.61	+7.76
Instructor	14	1/0.92	4/7.69	+6.77
Requirement(s)	15	1/0.92	6/11.53	+10.61
Citation Styles	16	11/10.18	6/11.53	+1.35
Transition(s)	17	2/1.85	2/3.84	+1.99
“How to ...”	18	9/8.33	7/13.46	+5.13
Genre/rhetorical knowledge	19	4/3.70	9/17.30	+13.60
Invention	20	7/6.48	6/11.53	+5.05
Evidence	21	3/2.34	5/9.61	+7.27
Positive emotional affect	22	0/0	2/3.84	+3.84
Negative emotional affect	23	3/2.77	5/9.61	+6.85
Everything	24	5/4.62	0/0	-4.62
Clarity	25	1/0.92	5/9.61	+8.69

**Table 2***MGCS' Use of Writing Center: Results of Initial Coding*

Category	Code	MGCS	MGCS	Rate Difference
		Appt. Forms (n=108)/ Rate	Report Forms (n=62)/Rate	
Help	1	5/4.62	6/9.67	+5.05
Understand	2	4/3.70	0/0	-3.70
Sentence-level issues	3	35/32.40	9/14.51	-17.89
Revise	4	9/8.33	3/4.83	-3.50
Fix	5	5/4.62	2/3.22	-1.40
Analyze	6	6/5.55	4/6.45	+0.90
Edit	7	24/22.22	7/11.29	-10.93
Organization	8	20/18.51	9/14.51	-4
Flow	9	6/5.55	2/3.22	-2.33
Thesis	10	9/8.33	13/20.96	+12.63
Introduction	11	1/0.92	4/6.45	+5.53
Conclusion	12	2/1.85	0/0	-1.85
Prompt	13	1/0.92	1/1.61	+0.69
Instructor	14	1/0.92	2/3.22	+2.30
Requirement(s)	15	1/0.92	2/3.22	+2.30
Citation Styles	16	27/25	17/27.41	+2.41
Transition(s)	17	2/1.85	1/3.22	-0.24
“How to . . .”	18	4/3.70	1/3.22	-2.09
Genre/rhetorical knowledge	19	4/3.70	1/3.22	-2.09
Invention	20	5/4.62	4/6.45	+1.83
Evidence	21	3/2.77	7/11.29	+8.52
Positive emotional affect	22	0/0	4/6.45	+6.45
Negative emotional affect	23	0/0	3/4.83	+4.83
Everything	24	2/1.85	0/0	-1.85
Clarity	25	2/1.85	3/4.83	+2.98

As illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, across groups, there was a strong correlation between the requests of writers and the comments of the consultants, meaning consultants prioritized writers’ self-expressed concerns. In other words, consultants consistently took a student-centered approach to writing consultations. One area of deviation was local concerns, which were de-emphasized by consultants in both groups. This shifting of attention is not surprising due to writing center pedagogy and the training of consultants, as most training manuals in the field, including the in-house

guide used by consultants at my university, prioritize global over local concerns in sessions unless grammar is identified as a pressing issue or a student specifically requests the consultant only focus on grammar. As the data show, across groups, writing consultants directed writers' attention away from sentence-level issues, editing, introductions, conclusions, citation styles, and transitions, instead choosing to focus on revision, analysis, organization, flow, thesis and argument, invention, and evidence. I realize classifying writing concerns into categories of local and global is an act of interpretation and that many writing centers do not use such categories at all; within the context of these consultants' training, however, these classifications seemed most appropriate for working with data in my center. While not all the former areas can be categorized as localized, sentence-level concerns, they do suggest attention to more finite writing tasks, whereas the categories of emphasis suggest attention to larger scale modifications and revisions that would involve significant reworking at the levels of sentence, structure, and argument/purpose.

In order to gain more insight into patterns of support offered to FGCS versus MGCS, I then grouped coded responses into the larger categories of local concerns, global concerns, and genre/rhetorical knowledge (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Code Groupings into Local, Global, And Genre/Rhetorical Concerns\**

Combined Categories with Included Codes	FGCS Appt. Forms/Rate	FGCS Report Forms/Rate	FGCS Rate Difference	MGCS Appt. Forms/Rate	MGCS Report Forms/Rate	MGCS Rate Difference
Local concerns (3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17, 24, 25)	90/83.33	42/80.76	-2.57	100/92.59	43/69.35	-23.24
Global concerns (4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 20, 21)	62/57.40	56/107.69	+50.29	58/53.70	42/67.74	+14.04
Genre/rhetorical Knowledge (6, 8, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21)	33/30.55	55/105.70	+75.15	36/33.33	26/41.90	+8.57

\* It is important to note that the groupings in Table 3 are just one possible interpretation of the data. Future researchers, especially those who do not use categories such as global and local in tutor training, may find other groupings to be more insightful. It is also important to note that some codes appear in more than one category. For example, *organization* appears in both the global concerns and the genre/rhetorical knowledge categories since organization is both a higher order concern and related to awareness of genres and rhetorical structures. Grouping codes also means the frequency of codes may exceed the number of appointments or report forms in some cases since forms

Although this trend was already visible on the first round of coding, this second grouping makes it clearer that FGCS received more assistance with global concerns and genre/rhetorical knowledge, even though FGCS were not as likely as MGCS to ask for this assistance.

Overall, three key differences between FGCS' sessions and MGCS' sessions arose from the case-study analysis:

1. First-generation sessions showed greater discrepancy between appointment requests and consultants' emphases and were more likely to focus on multiple concerns across stages of the writing process during a single session.
2. First-generation students were more likely to exhibit language denoting negative writing identities, and consultants were more likely to view sessions with first-generation students negatively, even though consultants had no prior knowledge about students' first-generation status.
3. First-generation college students received more assistance with global concerns and rhetorical knowledge, even though they were not as likely as multigenerational college students to ask for this assistance.

Although this is a case study and the sample is not large enough to be statistically significant, these findings suggest that writing center professionals reconsider common practices in writing centers in order to serve FGCS better. Below, I discuss each of these findings and their implications in detail.

### **“I Need Help on Many Things Please”: Rethinking Linear Models of Composing and Hierarchies of Global and Local to Better Support FGCS**

For FGCS, top areas of concern included sentence-level issues, editing, organization, and revision (codes 3, 7, 8, and 4, in descending order of frequency). For MGCS, top concerns varied slightly, including sentence-level issues, citation styles, editing, and organization (codes 3, 16, 7, and 8, in descending order of frequency). Although consultants tended

were often assigned multiple codes. In addition, I recognize some items may fit in other categories depending on the situation. For instance, citations may be a global concern depending on the assignment or instructor. However, for this study, I chose to include it as a local concern because, based on forms analyzed, it referred most frequently to making corrections in formatting at the sentence level. For this same reason, I labeled categories such as fix a *local concern*, whereas I labeled revise a *global concern*.

to address writers' concerns across groups, rates of focus corresponded more closely in the multigenerational sample. In this group, consultants reported focusing most frequently on citing sources, thesis statements and arguments, organization, and sentence-level issues (codes 16, 10, 8, and 3, in order of descending frequency). In the FGCS group, however, consultants reported focusing most frequently on sentence-level issues, organization, thesis statements and arguments, and genre/rhetorical knowledge (codes 3, 8, 10, and 19, in order of descending frequency). Thus, consultants seemed to introduce new points of focus having to do with bigger-picture concerns such as argument and genre/rhetorical knowledge more frequently when working with FGCS. This trend will be discussed at greater length in a later section.

Interestingly, even though consultants shifted the focus in FGCS' sessions to other, perhaps more pressing issues than sentence-level concerns, consultants did not exclude working at the sentence level. In fact, in sessions with FGCS, consultants focused on sentence-level concerns in nearly 15% more appointments than requested. Furthermore, consultants reported working with FGCS on sentence-level concerns at a much higher rate than reported with MGCS: 46:15 (n=24 vs. n=9, respectively). However, while consultants were more likely to work with FGCS on sentence-level issues, consultants used fewer words related to editing (FGCS requested editing assistance at a rate of nearly 30 appointments per 100, whereas consultants reported working on editing/proofreading at a rate of less than two appointments per 100).

One explanation for consultants' tendency to limit words related to editing may have to do with my center's mission and pedagogy, which, at the time of data collection, prioritized global concerns and stressed that consultants are not copyeditors. But this possibility is complicated by consultants' treatment of editing requests by MGCS. Consultants were much more likely to use terms related to editing with MGCS than with FGCS on report forms (n=7 vs. n=1, respectively), and there was a stronger correlation between requests for editing by MGCS and consultants' reports, indicated by a much lower projected rate difference (-10.23 for MGCS compared to -27.70 for FGCS). Increased points of focus could also be indicative of consultants feeling overwhelmed or lost during these sessions and thus reverting to sentence-level concerns as an easy way out; if FGCS and their consultants have a difficult time setting the tone and agenda, perhaps "grammar" is one thing both can discuss with relative ease.

Another explanation, however, is that consultants spend a substantial amount of time and energy on grammatical and mechanical principles with FGCS to facilitate clearer argument and thinking during writing, conflating traditional hierarchies of global/local concerns. This latter ex-

planation is supported by consultants' tendency to focus on issues related to "clarity" in FGCS' consultation reports. While FGCS asked for assistance with clarity at a rate of less than one appointment per 100, consultants reported working on clarity in nearly 10% of all appointments with FGCS (n=5). Although the number of appointment forms and consultant-report forms is small in this case study, using standard rates suggests consultants would be nearly three times more likely to introduce "clarity" as a point of focus in FGCS' appointments than in MGCS' appointments based on their consultation reports.

First-generation writers also seem to recognize that sentence-level issues may be interconnected with higher order concerns, as illustrated by their most frequent appointment requests. Results show FGCS and MGCS both prioritized sentence-level issues, editing, and organization most on appointment forms (codes 3, 7, and 8). In addition to these issues, however, FGCS emphasized revision—a stage in the writing process that typically occurs before sentence-level editing and polishing, while MGCS emphasized formatting citations (codes 4 and 16, respectively), a task associated with the final stages of editing and polishing. On the one hand, this distinction may indicate that FGCS are seeking help with higher order concerns or coming to the center earlier in the writing process than their multigenerational peers, who tended to focus more on sentence-level issues usually reserved for the editing stage. On the other hand, it could also indicate that FGCS come to the center at the same time or later than MGCS but are still working through global issues at this stage—or, it may mean many FGCS write within a different framework of time altogether.

This last possibility recalls Rebecca Jackson's (2008) story of Yolanda, a nontraditional writer whose material, social, and linguistic circumstances negated the conventional linearity of the writing process. In her article "Resisting Institutional Narratives: One Student's Counterstories of Writing and Learning in the Academy," Jackson recounts the inadequacy of the linear model of composing many centers and writing programs take up, a model that relies upon the assumption that students have time and leisure to "incubate" their ideas. As Jackson explains,

"Incubation" requires time; writing requires time. Yolanda does the best she can do with the time she does have. But her notion of time is different from my notion of time; her stories about time are different from my stories about time. Her stories about time *confront* my stories about time. (p. 32; emphasis in original)

If FGCS experience time or the process of writing differently than many MGCS, then consultants may need to rethink approaches to agenda setting during FGCS' appointments to allow alternative models and temporalities to emerge. And whatever their own background, consultants may

also need training in how to avoid invoking middle-class assumptions about efficiency and leisure that, by default, saturate conventional lore about writing as process. While scholarship in rhetoric and composition has candidly taken up postprocess theory, which resists the idea that the writing process can be reduced to *one* generalizable model and opens up space for alternative rhetorics and discourses, many writing center practitioners, as Tom Truesdell (2007) notes, have hesitated. To best support all students, including FGCS, many centers may need to re-examine process and postprocess theory in order to break out of restrictive hierarchies of composing.

Another finding supports the idea that FGCS experience revision in the writing center as nonhierarchical: consultants reported working on multiple issues during single sessions and may attempt to cover more ground than when working with MGCS. Consultants reported 145 items of focus after appointments with FGCS as compared to only 105 items of focus after appointments with MGCS, even though 10 more consultant-report forms were available for the latter group than for the former. On average, consultants reported working on approximately 1.69 issues with MGCS as compared to 2.79 issues with FGCS. Consultants tended to focus on one or two concerns when working with MGCS students, whereas they focused on two or more when working with FGCS. Based on the top four priority areas identified by consultants for FGCS, this means FGCS may more frequently receive help on different levels of revision or points in the writing process during a single session. As a case study, these results are not definitive, but they suggest that, when working with FGCS, consultants might need to think outside the hierarchies—global/local—they typically use to set the agenda, focusing instead on a more integrated approach.

The focus on multiple concerns—particularly sentence-level issues—could also be indicative of consultants opting to use a more directive approach when working with FGCS, which is supported by the increased use of *help/how to . . .* language (codes 1, 2, and 18) during FGCS' sessions. On their appointment forms, FGCS used this kind of language nearly twice as frequently as MGCS ( $n=24$  vs.  $n=13$ , respectively). On their report forms, consultants also used this language more frequently when working with FGCS as compared to MGCS ( $n=16$  vs.  $n=7$ , respectively). The use of *help/how to . . .* language on both types of forms suggests writers and consultants may be more likely to perceive the consultant role to be that of “expert” when working with FGCS as compared to MGCS. Denny, Nordlof, & Salem (2018) similarly found FGCS wanted consultants to be both experts and specialists during consultations, rather than generalists or indirect participants (pp. 79–80). These findings suggest

centers rethink how they train consultants to negotiate authority during sessions and to develop roles beyond generalist or indirect collaborator.

The desire for expertise could stem from FGCS' lack of knowledge or feelings of insecurity about how college works. Consultants might introduce more points of focus during sessions with FGCS because they receive less direction from these students, who may not have the same vocabulary or confidence as their multigenerational peers to guide the session's goals. When faced with less guidance from the writer, consultants may move back and forth between global and local concerns as issues arise organically during the session, moving away from the hierarchies stressed in their training. It may take the consultant more time to identify areas of focus or to figure out which tasks take precedence when there is less direction from the writer. This possibility is supported by more frequent requests from FGCS for help with "everything" or "many things" on appointment forms (n=5 vs. n=2, respectively). If FGCS are more likely to leave session goals in the hands of writing consultants, it makes sense that consultants use directive language more frequently in consultations with FGCS.

As Grutsch McKinney (2013) and Salem (2016) have argued, centers perhaps need to better support FGCS by worrying less about appearing remedial in order to provide the directive help FGCS desire (p. 68 and p. 162, respectively). For more than two decades, Salem and others have called for rethinking what Jeff Brooks (1991) coined "minimalist" tutoring (Clark, 2001; Clark & Healy, 1996; Hawthorne, 1999; Truesdell, 2007). My study suggests, yet again, that to best support students, especially FGCS, writing centers must rethink the use of nondirective strategies as a standardized, one-size-fits-all approach to consulting. Strategies such as the Socratic method, the use of hierarchies like global/local and the linearity they impose on process, and indirect questioning may not be a good fit for all students, particularly those who are first generation. For, as Salem (2016) eloquently explains,

Non-directive tutoring is not a "neutral" pedagogy that works equally well for everyone. Rather, it is a pedagogy that is most appropriate for students who have solid academic preparation—who already have a pretty good idea of what kind of text they are expected to produce—and who already feel a sense of self-efficacy and ownership over their texts. In other words, it is best suited to students with privilege and high academic standing. When students do not understand the expectations—when they "don't know what they don't know" about writing—then non-directive tutoring doesn't transform them into privileged students, it simply frustrates them. (p. 163)

If FGCS have less experience than MCGS do with academic writing and reading, they may simply struggle more with texts as they invent, draft, and revise. Sentence-level “errors,” as defined by the academy, are only natural when students begin writing in what may be less familiar genres and rhetorical situations. A fear of lacking required grammar skills and the stigma that can accompany such fears can alone create writing anxiety, compounding error. A lack of knowledge about genre conventions and academic rhetorical situations can induce writing anxiety. It is likely many FGCS, who may be multiliterate but lacking in confidence, see grammar as bound up in their pursuit of academic success in ways MGCS do not. Using a more directive approach to consulting when FGCS request it or benefit from it could provide these students with confidence as they enter college discourse communities.

Rethinking these aspects of consultant training and writing center pedagogy, however, requires careful attention to the politics of literacy, the fluidity of language, and the consultant role when working with FGCS. If consultants find themselves being positioned or positioning themselves as directive experts, it is important that consultants balance teaching with respect for students’ multiliteracies and stores of knowledge. Research on literacy and identity politics has consistently shown how the academy uses standardized English “grammar” to silence and oppress minority students,<sup>9</sup> especially those who identify as racial or ethnic minorities, many of whom may also be first generation. Consultants’ tendency to include grammar instruction could be indicative of conscious or unconscious bias toward FGCS and the literacies FGCS bring to the table. Consultants may see themselves as a sort of hybrid gatekeeper/friend, guiding FGCS as they learn what Nancy Grimm (1999) and Gerald Graff (2007) famously refer to as “the rules of the game.” If this is the case, it is critical that consultants, who may themselves be navigating the politics of literacy within the academy, are trained to simultaneously educate FGCS in the skills sought *and* empower FGCS to have agency within the discourse communities they enter. But, as Grutsch McKinney (2013) points out, consulting, in this context, is a mere “bandage” for the “war-wounded” that ignores “the war” (p. 69). Administrators must imagine the writing center as a space or mission that can challenge the institutional systems and regulations that create such bias to begin with (Grimm, 1996, 2011; Grutsch McKinney,

---

9 See, for example, classic pieces such as those by Lisa Delpit (2006), Laura Greenfield (2011), Geneva Smitherman (1995), and Vershawn Young (2011). Although he does not focus on minority students and the politics of literacy, Joseph Williams’s (1981) article “The Phenomenology of Error” is also of note, as it links grammar to social hierarchies and social anxieties while simultaneously pointing to its arbitrariness.

2013). In order to meet the needs of FGCS without recreating systematic bias, more research is needed into how FGCS and consultants negotiate agenda setting and roles during consultations—do FGCS request/demand expertise? Or do consultants who are MGCS impose expertise onto sessions problematically, without invitation? Once expertise is on the table, how is it taken up and discussed by both parties? How might this negotiation be complicated by other factors, such as gender, race, and age, or a consultant’s identification as first generation?

### **“I Am a Horrible Writer”: Negative Emotional Affect and FGCS’ Consultations**

Study results also indicate that, when compared to MGCS, FGCS are more likely to express negative views of their writing ability. This finding is consistent with existing research that shows FGCS are more likely to lack confidence as writers than are MGCS (Denny, Nordlof, & Salem 2018; Engle, 2007; Peckham, 2010; Penrose, 2002). First-generation students were more likely than MGCS to use negative emotional language on their appointment forms (2.77:0, or  $n=3$  vs.  $n=0$ , respectively), including comments such as “I am a horrible writer with a time crunch”; “I . . . have a problem with getting off topic easily without noticing”; and “I need help getting over my writer’s block.” Multigenerational students did not use self-deprecating language or terms such as “problem” in their appointment forms. This suggests FGCS are more likely to have negative perceptions of writing or of themselves as writers when they enter college.

Data also suggest writing consultants may inadvertently reinforce these negative identities by using less positive and more negative language in their consultation reports for FGCS. While neither group of writers showed signs of positive emotional affect on their appointment forms, writing consultants used positive language in consultation reports nearly twice as often for MGCS than for FGCS (6.45:3.84, or  $n=4$  vs.  $n=2$ , respectively). Examples of positive affect on consultation reports included comments such as “We had a very productive session”; “The essay was very well-written and addressed each aspect of the prompt very well”; “[Student] was very receptive to the session and came prepared with thoughtful questions”; and “This appointment was a blast!” Consultants were also much more likely to use negative language on reports for FGCS than on those for MGCS (9.61:4.83, or  $n=5$  vs.  $n=3$ , respectively). Examples of negative commentary on FGCS reports included phrases such as “The organization was excruciatingly problematic”; “I felt overwhelmed by the amount of material I had to sift through in order to give her the feedback she wanted”; “The essay suffered from . . .”; “I could not understand the

structure of the paper whatsoever. I had to ask [another consultant] to step in and help me, because the paper needed so much work. This was the most challenging session I have had all year”; and “[The student] was having issues with understanding narrative structure.”

In consultants’ commentary, negative emotions surface most frequently through adjectives/adverbs/qualifiers (“excruciatingly”; “whatsoever”; “so much”; “most challenging”) and diction that calls to mind a defect or physical ailment (“problematic”; “suffered from”; “issues with”). Although these comments and others like them do not directly fault writers, the connotation suggests it is the writer, not the assignment, instructor, or consultant, who is at fault for the “problem” consultation, an attitude reflective of the hierarchical organization of the university, which tends to place the burden for success on individuals. This attitude problematically replicates systemic inequities within the university, involving the writing center in unjust practices of academic gatekeeping bound up in the politics of literacy. The language in reports also captures a sense of heightened negative emotional affect that saturates consultations with FGCS, something that could contribute to negative writing center experiences and lower rates of academic success for this group of students. Furthermore, consultants could unconsciously create a snowball effect since, at my institution, consultants use these reports as in-house records to guide future sessions with returning writers. By reading negative language in FGCS’ appointment reports prior to meeting with these students, consultants may enter sessions with implicit biases already in place.

One implication of this finding is the importance of providing consultants with more training on how to avoid emotionally traumatic language in all consultations, especially in those with writers who already exhibit lower writing confidence and negative writing identity. While their results may not be generalizable to all student populations, Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson (2013) suggest centers experiment with motivational scaffolding (or praise) to improve writers’ confidence and motivation. Providing a supportive, positive emotional environment through nonverbal cues and praise has been linked to improved writing ability (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Maclellan, 2005). Although I did not examine session notes or transcripts, consultation reports suggest consultants working with FGCS may be less likely to use motivational scaffolding in their sessions. This trend could contribute to the negative feelings FGCS have about their writing. Of course, consultants may not always find politeness and scaffolding techniques to be effective with FGCS, especially if these students are not native English speakers (Bell & Youmans, 2006; Thonus, 2004, 1999). However, by becoming more aware of the uses of praise as well as negative emotional affect during sessions, either through

training or the use of session notes and reflection, writing consultants would be able use motivational scaffolding to challenge implicit biases or to improve FGCS' perceptions of themselves as writers as they navigate the transition to college.

### **“Structurally Where Do I Go and Am I on Track So Far?”: FGCS and Global Concerns**

Another trend of FGCS' appointments was a greater emphasis on global concerns and teaching students about genre and rhetorical knowledge. Even though FGCS and MGCS requested assistance with global concerns and genre/rhetorical knowledge at similar rates and frequencies (57.40:53.7, or n=62 vs. n=58; and 30.55:33.33 or n=33 vs. n=36, respectively), consultants emphasized these issues in their reports at much higher rates and frequencies when working with FGCS (107.69: 67.74, or n=56 vs. n=42; and 105.7:41.90, or n=55 vs. n=26, respectively). The rate difference for genre/rhetorical knowledge was even more pronounced, with consultants reporting focusing on these concerns at more than triple the rate requested by FGCS (30.55:105.70, or n=33 vs. n=55). When comparing across groups, consultants emphasized global concerns at nearly double the rate (107.69:67.74, or n=56 vs. n=42) and genre/rhetorical knowledge at more than double the rate (105.7:41.90, or n=55 vs. n=26) in their reports when working with FGCS.

These findings indicate that FGCS receive more support in understanding genre and academic writing conventions than do their multigenerational peers. The greater frequency of words such as “analysis,” “assignment,” “requirements,” and “teacher,” “instructor,” or “professor” on FGCS' report forms suggests consultants spend time metaconsulting on genre and assignment requirements before moving on to composing, as these words are most commonly used in relationship with decoding readings, assignment prompts, rubrics, and/or instructors' commentary. For example, many consultants expressed concern that FGCS did not understand prompts, writing: “She wanted help with her argumentative essay. I read through it with her and helped to point out that it was more of an opinion essay. We then revised to meet the prompt”; “I tried to get [Student's] input on whether this was a typical essay or one that required alternative organization as demanded by her instructor. She seemed to vacillate on this point”; and “First, we went over the professor's assignment sheet. It seemed that [the student] had either misunderstood the assignment requirements, or he had not read them.” These comments by consultants imply that a large portion of what consultants do with FGCS is redirect their attention from the immediacy of composition to the

genre conventions and academic expectations governing academic-text production.

This finding is consistent with Denny, Nordlof, & Salem's (2018) research, which revealed that FGCS came to writing centers seeking knowledge of "what 'college' wants in terms of writing," suggesting a belief in a single correct "structure" writing consultants can explain (pp. 76–77). While Denny, Nordlof, & Salem found FGCS seeking genre/rhetorical knowledge, my study suggests consultants might focus on these areas even when students do not initially ask for this assistance. Taken together, these studies imply writing centers must think critically about the ways centers shape FGCS' knowledge of academic genres and conventions, as well as how centers approach delivery of this knowledge. Denny, Nordlof, & Salem articulate the difficulty of conveying the complexities of genre to FGCS, many of whom want a direct answer regarding how to write well in college. By focusing on metaconsulting, genre, and rhetorical knowledge, consultants may provide FGCS with vocabulary, epistemological frameworks, and compositional/rhetorical tools for navigating the perhaps unfamiliar landscape of academic writing, but consultants may do so at the high cost of frustrating many FGCS in search of neater, more straightforward answers.

### **Moving Forward: Toward a Writing Center That Works for FGCS**

Several implications for future research and practice emerged from this case study. Based on these preliminary findings, writing center scholars must continue to interrogate practices and consultant training related to the linear model of composing, global/local hierarchies, and the directive/nondirective continuum in order to meet students, especially those who identify as FGCS, where these students are and embrace alternative modalities and temporalities. This work has been going on for quite some time in many, many centers, but it can continue in ways attuned to the needs of FGCS. Additionally, more research is needed investigating the origins of the difference between FGCS' and MGCS' appointments. Since consultants in this study were not informed of consultees' first-generation status, it is impossible to know where and how implicit biases or differences in practice emerged: Were certain strategies or approaches to consulting introduced by the writer, the consultant, or both? Similarly, were areas of potential biases or instances of negative emotional affect introduced by consultants, the writer, or both? To answer these questions, we need to understand more about how authority and consultant/writer roles are established and carried out in FGCS' sessions. How do FGCS and consultants, who may themselves be FGCS, negotiate in the area Janice

Wolff (2000), using Mary Louis Pratt's theoretical framework, calls the "contact zone" of the tutorial (p. 44)? In what ways can consultants embrace authority and expertise to ease FGCS' sense of anxiety about college writing? How can consultants (and centers more broadly) learn from FGCS' resistance to mainstream, middle-class narratives about time and composing to reshape their own "grand narratives" of writing center work? Finally, writing centers must develop better ways of assessing all students' familiarity with and anxiety about academic writing conventions, genres, and rhetorical moves in order to provide all students, particularly those who identify as FGCS, with agency to make informed decisions about their own texts.

In order to learn more about all these areas, future research must move beyond the case-study design to identify statistically significant, generalizable trends contributing to FGCS writing identities and experiences. Institutions can replicate this case study in order to learn more about local populations and to improve generalizability, but we ultimately need cross-institutional studies with representative samples to generate a foundation of knowledge from which to reshape our best practices for supporting writers who are FGCS. Additionally, new studies with similar aims can be designed to gather more representative forms of data, including session transcripts and notes, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. These future studies should not only examine first-generation status but should take an intersectional approach by adding additional variables such as (but not limited to) race, gender, Pell eligibility, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. Since FGCS are a diverse, heterogeneous group, these variables are significant to our understanding of these students as writers.

#### Acknowledgments

*I would like to thank the editors of WCJ and the reviewers for their generous feedback and support during the publication process. I would also like to thank Harry Denny, whose feedback and guidance on early drafts was invaluable.*

## References

- Augusta University. (2018). First generation survey. Retrieved from <https://www.augusta.edu/fye/first-gen-survey.php>
- Balemian, K., & Feng, J. (2013). First-generation students: College aspirations, preparedness and challenges. Slides presented at the College Board Advanced Placement Annual Conference, Las Vega, NV, July 19. Retrieved from <https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2013/8/presentation-apac-2013-first-generation-college-aspirations-preparedness-challenges.pdf>
- Bell, D. C., & Youmans, M. (2006). Politeness and praise: Rhetorical issues in ESL (L2) writing center conferences. *Writing Center Journal*, 26(2), 31–47.
- Brooks, J. (1991). Minimalist tutoring: Making the student do all the work. *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 15(6), 1–4. Retrieved from <http://ucwbling.chicagolandwritingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Jeff-Brooks-Minimalist-Tutoring-Making-the-Student-Do-All-the-Work.pdf>
- Brown, G., Hurst, B., & Hail, C. (2016). Early reading experiences: An artifact of cultural capital. *Critical Questions in Education*, 7(2), 116–129.
- Bruning, R., & Horn, C. (2000). Developing motivation to write. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(1), 25–37.
- Choy, S. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Clark, I. (2001). Perspectives on the directive/nondirective continuum in the writing center. *Writing Center Journal*, 22(1), 35–58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43442135>
- Clark, I., & Healy, D. (1996). Are writing centers ethical? *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 20(1/2), 32–48.

- Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). “Is that paper really due today?”: Differences in first-generation and traditional college students’ understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55(4), 425–446. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9065-5>
- Davis, J. (2010). *The first-generation student experience: Implications for campus practice, and strategies for improving persistence and success*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people’s children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Denny, H. (2010). *Facing the center: Toward an identity politics of one-to-one mentoring*. Logan: Utah State University Press, DigitalCommons@USU. Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress\\_pubs/168/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/168/)
- Denny, H., Nordlof, J., & Salem, L. (2018). “Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that was so bad”: Understanding the needs and expectations of working-class students in writing centers. *Writing Center Journal*, 37(1), 67–98.
- Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students. *American Academic*, 3(1), 25–48. Retrieved from <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/328327>
- Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504448.pdf>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London: Routledge.
- Graff, G. (2007). Our undemocratic curriculum. *Profession*, 8, 128–135.
- Greenfield, L. (2011). The “standard English” fairy tale: A rhetorical analysis of racist pedagogies and commonplace assumptions about language diversity. In L. Greenfield & K. Rowan (Eds.), *Writing centers and the new racism: A call for sustainable dialogue and change* (pp. 33–60). Logan: Utah State University Press.

- Grimm, N. M. (1996). The regulatory role of the writing center: Coming to terms with a loss of innocence. *Writing Center Journal*, 17(1), 5–29.
- Grimm, N. M. (1999). *Good intentions: Writing center work for postmodern times*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Grimm, N. M. (2011). Rethinking writing center work to transform a system of advantage based on race. In L. Greenfield & K. Rowan (Eds.), *Writing centers and the new racism* (pp. 75–100). Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Grutsch McKinney, J. (2013). *Peripheral visions for writing centers*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Hall, R. M. (2017). *Around the texts of writing center work: An inquiry-based approach to tutor education*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Hawthorne, J. (1999). “We don’t proofread here”: Re-visioning the writing center to better meet student needs. *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 23(8), 1–7. Retrieved from <https://wlnjournal.org/archives/v23/23.8.pdf>
- Jackson, R. L. (2008). Resisting institutional narratives: One student’s counterstories of writing and learning in the academy. *Writing Center Journal*, 28(1), 23–41.
- Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Londono-Connally, M., Boals, A., & Duron, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students’ social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counselling*, 16(2), 129–142. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2013.00032.x
- London, H. B. (1992). Transformations: Cultural challenges faced by first-generation students. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 80, 5–11.
- . (1996). How college affects first-generation college students. *About Campus*, 1 (5), 23, 9–13.

- Mackiewicz, J., & Thompson, I. (2013). Motivational scaffolding, politeness, and writing center tutoring. *Writing Center Journal*, 33(1), 38–73. Retrieved from <https://www.iwcamembers.org/wcj2/33.1.pdf>
- Maclellan, E. (2005). Academic achievement: The role of praise in motivating students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(3), 194–206. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1469787405057750>
- Oldfield, K. (2007). Humble and hopeful: Welcoming first-generation poor and working-class students to college. *About Campus*, 11(6), 2–12.
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(3), 249–84. doi: 10.1353/jhe.2004.0016
- Peckham, I. (2010). *Going north, thinking west: The intersections of social class, critical thinking, and politicized writing instruction*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Penrose, A. M. (2002). Academic literacy perceptions and performance: Comparing first-generation and continuing-generation college students. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36(4), 437–461. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40004772>
- Postsecondary National Policy Institute. (2016). First generation students. PNPI:
- Postsecondary National Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://pnpi.org/factsheets/first-generation-students/>
- Purswell, K. E., Yazedjian, A., & Toews, M. L. (2008). Students' intentions and social support as predictors of self-reported academic behaviors: A comparison of first- and continuing-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 10(2), 191–206.

- Redford, J., & Mulvaney Hoyer, K., & Ralph, J. (2017). *First-generation and continuing-generation college students: A comparison of high school and postsecondary experiences*. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018009.pdf>
- Saenz, V. B., Hurtado, S., Barrera, D., Wolf, D., & Yeung, F. (2007). *First in my family: A profile of first-generation college students at four-year institutions since 1971*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/TFS/Special/Monographs/FirstInMyFamily.pdf>
- Salem, L. (2016). Decisions . . . decisions: Who chooses to use the writing center? *Writing Center Journal*, 35(2), 147–171. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/561fea24e4b0355fd7db67b7/t/5a0b6926652dea2f6438af33/1510697254548/Salem%2C+WCJ%2C+35.2%2C+Final+Press+Copy.pdf>
- Smitherman, G. (1995). “Students’ right to their own language”: A retrospective. *English Journal*, 84(1), 21–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/820470>
- Sundburg, C. A. (2007). A bleacher seat view of cultural capital: How bad is the dented bat? *About Campus*, 11(6), 8–10.
- Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, P. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01680039>
- Thonus, T. (2004). What are the differences?: Tutor interactions with first and second language writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(3), 227–242.
- Truesdell, T. (2007). Not choosing sides: Using directive and non-directive methodology in a writing session. *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 31(6), 7–11. Retrieved from <http://ucwbling.chicagolandwritingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Tom-Truesdell-Not-Choosing-Sides.pdf>

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). Profile of undergraduate students: 2011–12. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015167.pdf>
- Ward, L., Siegel, M. J., & Davenport, Z. (2012). *First-generation college students: Understanding and improving the experience from recruitment to commencement*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Williams, J. M. (1981). The phenomenology of error. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(2), 152–168. Retrieved from <http://www.english.illinois.edu/~people-/faculty/schaffner/Williams%20Error.pdf>
- Wolff, J. M. (2000). Tutoring in the “contact zone.” In L. C. Briggs & M. Woolbright (Eds.), *Stories from the center: Connecting narrative and theory in the writing center* (pp. 43–50). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Young, V. A. (2011). Should writers use they own English? In L. Greenfield & K. Rowan (Eds.), *Writing centers and the new racism: A call for sustainable dialogue and change* (pp. 61–72). Logan: Utah State University Press.

## Appendix

Code Number	Code category	Variations/terms included in category	Examples
1	Help	“Help with . . .”; “Assistance”	“I need help.” “Student needed help with . . .”
2	Understand	understand; understanding; clarify; clarification	“Maybe you could help me get a better understanding of what my teacher is saying.” “I am not clear on the prompt.” “understanding better what I did wrong”
3	Sentence-level issues	grammar; mechanics; usage; style; diction; syntax; spelling; phrasing; sentence structure	“grammar” “phrasing errors” “grammatical corrections” “spelling help”
4	Revise	revise; revisions; revising; work on earlier draft; rework; revisit draft; writing/revising final draft	“revise paper” “revising my rough draft” “revising it from already turning it in” “I really want you to see what I’ve been working on. I reworked the short story I was working on [with you] a couple of weeks ago and I want to see what you think of it.”
5	Fix	fix; fixing	“fixed several run-on and fragment sentences” “help to fix a paper I wrote” “I would ask her if she knew how to fix [the incorrect punctuation], and if she didn’t I would offer advice as necessary.”
6	Analyze	analyze; analyzing; analysis; explaining/analyzing text vs. summarizing text; interpret; comparing/ contrasting texts	“interpreting the meaning of a song into an essay” “She wanted tips on how to remove some of the extra summary and add in explanation in order to improve her paper.” “analysis of the book” “We worked on analyzing the material.”
7	Edit	edit; editing; proofread; review; go over; finalize	“review my essay” “proofread” “read over paper” “go over the essay” “look over” “editing”

Code Number	Code category	Variations/terms included in category	Examples
8	Organization	organization; organize; outline; structure; arrange; arrangement; focus; order; set up	<p>“I need help setting this up in a draft.”</p> <p>“organization of paper”</p> <p>“argument structure”</p> <p>“work on an outline”</p> <p>“organizational issues”</p>
9	Flow	flow; coherent	<p>“make sure [the paper] flows”</p> <p>“overall flow of the paper”</p> <p>“revised the paper to assure that . . . the paper was coherent”</p>
10	Thesis	thesis; argument; claim	<p>“thesis”</p> <p>“how to keep track of the thesis in each paragraph”</p> <p>“I tried to impress upon her the importance of specific claims”</p> <p>“argument development.”</p>
11	Introduction	introduction	<p>“We discussed how she should write her introduction.”</p> <p>“introduction”</p> <p>“help with the process of writing an introduction”</p>
12	Conclusion	conclusion	“making a conclusion”
13	Prompt	prompt; assignment; assignment sheet; instructions; rubric	<p>“I am not clear on the prompt.”</p> <p>“We looked at her assignment sheet.”</p> <p>“[Student] and I combed through his analysis to make sure that he followed his professor’s rigorous instructions.”</p> <p>“going over the professor’s extensive assignment sheet”</p>
14	Instructor	instructor; teacher; professor; TA	<p>“I tried to get [Student’s] input on whether this was a typical essay or one that required an alternative organization as demanded by her instructor.”</p> <p>“[I helped so] she could write her paper according to the professor’s standards.”</p> <p>“Maybe you could help me get a better understanding of what my teacher is saying in his comments.”</p>

Code Number	Code category	Variations/terms included in category	Examples
15	Requirement(s)	requirement(s); rubric; criteria; standards	<p>“Revised the paper to assure that the thesis was good enough for the requirements of the assignment.”</p> <p>“[I helped so] she could write her paper according to the professor’s standards.”</p> <p>“It seemed that [Student] had either misunderstood the assignment requirements, or he had not read them.”</p> <p>“[Student] had a rubric for a draft of a paper, and she wanted help working over the areas where she scored poorly in order to improve them.”</p>
16	Citation Styles	citing sources; MLA/APA/Chicago/etc. style; structuring/integrating quotations; formatting documents and/or citations	<p>“[check] if citations are correct”</p> <p>“quote sandwiches”</p> <p>“format essay to APA”</p> <p>“MLA citations for internet”</p> <p>“works cited”</p>
17	Transition(s)	transition(s)	<p>“We worked on grammar and transitions today.”</p> <p>“transitions”</p>
18	“How to...”	all “how to ...” phrases	<p>“how to fix it”</p> <p>“how to cite in APA”</p> <p>“how to better at writing a paper”</p> <p>“explaining to her the mistakes and how to correct them”</p> <p>“talked about how to strengthen a thesis statement”</p>
19	Genre/Rhetorical Knowledge	genres; structures (of certain types of papers); audience expectations (for genres/disciplines/academia); genre conventions	<p>“Rogerian Model: work on organization”</p> <p>“I tried to steer him towards some basic creative writing fundamentals. As the session wound down, I emphasized the importance of treating the reader with respect.”</p> <p>“[help] on how to write this kind of paper”</p> <p>“[Student] was having issues understanding the basic structure of a narrative. I explained to her the general elements, so she could write her paper.”</p> <p>“I gave [Student] a few tips on the rhetorical situation and tried to get him to view his paper from the reader’s perspective.”</p>

Code Number	Code category	Variations/terms included in category	Examples
20	Invention	brainstorm; develop ideas; generate ideas; getting started; planning	<p>“ideas for research paper”</p> <p>“We looked at her assignment sheet and discussed her approach to the paper”</p> <p>“[Student] and I talked about some major ideas that she would be using in her paper.”</p> <p>“getting started”</p> <p>“I need help planning and writing my essay.”</p> <p>“brainstormed similarities and differences”</p>
21	Evidence	evidence; support; details; specificity; examples; persuading	<p>“building strong, full paragraphs”</p> <p>“I would like to work on the development of my argument and finding more quotes to support my argument.”</p> <p>“We also worked on adding in concrete details to the paper to support the claim.”</p> <p>“refined her supporting points”</p> <p>“We talked about how he could be more specific.”</p>
22	Positive Emotional Affect	positive language; praise; excitement/engagement	<p>“She had tons of interesting things to say about her topic.”</p> <p>“It was encouraging to note that [Student] focused on the main aspects of his rhetorical analysis.”</p> <p>“We had a very productive session.”</p> <p>“generally a great paper”</p> <p>“This appointment was a blast!”</p>
23	Negative Emotional Affect	negative language; nonconstructive criticism; anxiety/lack of Confidence	<p>“[Student’s] narrative was impene-trable. The setting was unclear, the characters were undeveloped, and the whole thing was just generally confusing. Unfortunately, [Student] was really trying to go for some esoteric story construction.”</p> <p>“This session was terrible. She didn’t know what she was talking about, so we both were lost.”</p> <p>“I need help getting over my writer’s block.”</p> <p>“The organization was excruciatingly problematic”</p> <p>“I could not understand the structure of the paper whatsoever . . . this was the most challenging session I have had all year.”</p>

Code Number	Code category	Variations/terms included in category	Examples
24	Everything	everything; many things; all of it; indefinite questions/concerns	<p>“questions about the paper”</p> <p>“There are many issues that I’m having while trying to write this paper.”</p> <p>“general help”</p> <p>“I need help on many things.”</p>
25	Clarity	clarity; being clear	<p>“We worked on clarity.”</p> <p>“We addressed the flow and clarity of the essay.”</p> <p>“revise for precision and clarification”</p> <p>“I tried to stress the importance of developing ideas with clarity instead of relying on vague terms or generalized statements.”</p> <p>“We worked on developing a clear thesis statement and clear body paragraphs.”</p>

**Candis Bond** is director of the Writing Center at Augusta University, where she also serves as assistant professor of English and Women’s and Gender Studies. Her research interests include writing in the disciplines, writing center theory and practice, and intersections of writing pedagogy and social justice.

