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## “Was it useful? Like, really?”: Client and Consultant Perceptions of Post-Session Satisfaction Surveys

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Katie Levin, Sarah Selz, Meredith Steck, and Eric Wisz

## **“Was it useful? Like, *really?*”: Client and Consultant Perceptions of Post-Session Satisfaction Surveys**

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### **Abstract**

Client satisfaction surveys have long been a cornerstone of writing center assessment, but to date, research on satisfaction surveys has largely focused on analyzing client responses from the survey and their administrative uses. Research rarely investigates why clients provide the responses they do and how consultants process these responses. This study, therefore, involved conducting separate client and consultant focus groups to learn about each population's interactions with one writing center's optional post-session satisfaction survey and the survey results. The findings revealed that while client participants used the survey to communicate high levels of satisfaction, client participants also thought about the survey in multifaceted ways that took into account complex factors, such as their relationship with the writing center and care for consultants' feelings. The study also showed that consultant participants valued positive feedback from clients but that consultants found their survey responses to have limited utility for professional growth and that they craved more specific and constructive feedback. This article offers considerations for how writing center professionals can better communicate the purpose of surveys to both clients and consultants, and it proposes additional forms of assessment that could allow consultants and administrators to hear the nuanced feedback clients can offer.

“Was it useful? Like, *really*?” a client in one of our focus groups mused as they tried to describe what they actually wanted to communicate through our writing center’s post-session satisfaction survey. Their question succinctly captures what many clients want to communicate—the usefulness of sessions—but it is also a question worth asking of the satisfaction survey itself. Is the survey a useful tool, *really*? What kind of feedback does it invite clients to give? Is it actually providing consultants with substantive feedback, or are the largely glowing responses “just to inflate our egos,” as one consultant focus group participant joked? We know that satisfaction surveys are useful for at least some purposes. In the neoliberal university, where resources are scarce and data-driven results are prized by those who hold the purse strings, survey results can make compelling arguments for the continued existence of academic centers (Rustin, 2016). At the writing center, gathering student voices through post-session surveys is a savvy strategy for professionals who need data to bolster funding requests or annual reports. Surveys provide a quick and easy way to solicit client feedback and to highlight accomplishments to stakeholders. As such, satisfaction surveys are a long-standing form of writing center assessment.

The field, however, has identified limitations with survey assessment. For example, as Miriam Gofine (2012, p. 42), Isabelle Thompson (2006, p. 44), Julie Bauer Morrison & Jean-Paul Nadeau (2003, pp. 30–31), and James H. Bell (2000, p. 9) have noted, satisfaction surveys given immediately post-session often lead to overly positive responses from clients. Literature in other fields has enriched our understanding about problems with satisfaction surveys. Healthcare research, for example, has suggested that people who experience problems during hospital stays are less likely to respond to patient-satisfaction surveys (Perneger, Chamot, & Bouvier, 2005); in marketing, researchers have found that the completeness and accuracy of satisfaction survey data are compromised by a number of factors, including customers’ intention to return, overall satisfaction, and the time between initial and follow-up surveys (Powers & Valentine, 2009). Closer to home, research on student evaluations of teaching has demonstrated that higher teaching evaluation scores come from students who value the evaluation process than from those who do not (Spooren & Christiaens, 2017). In other words, it is not only teacher performance but also students’ own belief in using surveys to evaluate that performance that can affect students’ survey responses. Further, we know that across domains, satisfaction survey responses can reflect other biases. What respondents write or select on surveys is affected by, for instance, the perceived gender (Bertakis, Franks, & Azari, 2003; MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2015; Wallace, Lewis, & Allen, 2019; Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2021) and race/ethnicity (Cooper, Roter, Johnson, Ford, Steinwachs, & Powe, 2003; Merritt, 2008; Wallace, Lewis, & Allen, 2019) of healthcare providers and university

faculty alike. All of this research tells us that survey responses need to be interpreted with caution.

Despite these problems, post-session satisfaction surveys remain popular in writing centers; the National Census of Writing reported that of the writing centers that responded to their 2017 questionnaire, 81% of writing centers at two-year institutions (Gladstein & Fralix, 2017b, How are the goals assessed? question) and 84% of writing centers at four-year institutions (Gladstein & Fralix, 2017a, How are the goals assessed? question) used “student feedback forms” as part of their assessment systems. In fact, ours is one of those centers that uses feedback forms! At the time of our writing, at our center, clients were emailed an optional student satisfaction survey after every session (an average of 11,000 visits per academic year), and consultants received their aggregated survey responses once per semester. The optional nature of the survey limited the amount of data we received; usually, we have had about a 20% response rate. And, as the literature would predict, our survey responses typically painted a highly positive picture of our consultants’ work, with 95–99% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements such as, “The consultant addressed my needs and concerns,” “The consultant was respectful of me and my writing,” and “After the session, I had a clear idea of what I would do next on my paper/project” (see Appendix A for the full survey). Administrators at our center highlighted these responses in reports to stakeholders and often used the glowing comments about individual consultants to buttress praise in recommendation letters. As much as we appreciated how these survey responses highlighted our accomplishments, we remained skeptical of their overwhelmingly positive tenor: Were we really that good? What were clients not saying to us?

These questions are important for writing center professionals who use surveys to evaluate writing centers as a whole, but they are also important for consultants who want to use survey responses for individual reflection and growth. Research has suggested that surveys have limitations as tools for informing educational practice. Studies of how instructors take up feedback from student evaluations of teaching, for example, can shed some light on these limitations. Rachel Johnson (2000) described how mandatory student evaluation questionnaires stunt teachers’ ability to learn and grow from assessment. These questionnaires, Johnson concluded, “undermin[e] and devalu[e] the professional’s own responsibility for initiating creative means of investigation” (p. 433); that is, student evaluation questionnaires do not allow teachers to create assessments that take into account their own experience, observations, and knowledge. Research into how instructors use end-of-semester student evaluations of teaching has also suggested that although teachers would like to use that evaluative feedback to develop pedagogy, end-of-semester evaluations are not conducive to forming better teaching practices for several reasons,

both structural and individual (Yao & Grady, 2006). Given the limitations of surveys as tools for teacher growth, it is unlikely that post-session satisfaction surveys give consultants feedback that encourages reflection and development.

The popularity of writing center post-session surveys, in combination with the limitations of satisfaction surveys, invites questions about the survey's utility as a feedback and development tool. To date, the majority of research on writing center satisfaction surveys has discussed how their results can be used for administrative audiences (Lerner, 1997; Thompson, 2006; Gofine, 2012) and for conducting cross-institutional assessment projects (Bromley, Northway, & Schonberg, 2013). Another strand of survey research has analyzed survey responses to understand clients' goals and priorities (Thompson, Whyte, Shannon, Muse, Miller, Chappell, & Whigham, 2009; Cheatle, 2017; Hedengren & Lockerd, 2017)—a strand that Yanar Hashlamon (2018) identified as the start of an “epistemological shift” toward valuing client perspectives on writing center pedagogy (p. 10). Our study joins this “shift” not only by hearing from clients about their experiences in sessions but also by talking to clients about the survey as an instrument for gathering their feedback. There is not much research to date on how consultants process post-session satisfaction survey responses, although consultant reflection and post-session assessment, whether alone or in partnership with colleagues or writing center professionals, are widely researched methods for consultant development (e.g., Bell, 2001; Thonus, 2002; Hall, 2011; Pigliacelli, 2019). In our study, we therefore also listened to consultants, the recipients of this survey feedback, and learned how they felt about surveys as resources for their own development.

Our field strongly believes in the value of student knowledge for shaping writing center practices. Our regional and international conferences have featured the scholarship of student consultants, and undergraduate researchers have been published in our journals and in tutor education texts such as the *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2015). Writing center scholars such as Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth H. Boquet (2007) and R. Mark Hall (2017) have strongly advocated for consultants acting as leaders, including collaboratively developing “valued practices” (Hall, 2017). And, recently, Hashlamon (2018) made a compelling case for drawing on the knowledge of clients. Both client and consultant knowledge should play an active role in the design and evaluation of our assessment practices, which, as Ellen Schendel & William J. Macauley (2012) pointed out, are “necessarily collaborative” and involve multiple stakeholders (p. xxi). Therefore, our study foregrounded both clients' and consultants' relationships with satisfaction survey items and responses. We asked clients and consultants at our center a set of questions related to use of the satisfaction survey. What do clients and consultants perceive to be the purpose of the survey? What feedback items are most meaningful? What

kinds of feedback would clients like to provide? What kinds of feedback would consultants like to receive? (See Appendix B and Appendix C for a complete list of questions.)

Through separate focus groups with client and consultant populations, we learned more about what clients were thinking and feeling about completing surveys and about how consultants were using (or not using) survey responses to reflect on practice. Our results revealed that satisfaction surveys had limited capacity to communicate client experiences or facilitate consultant development. Clients we spoke to who indicated having filled out the post-session survey reported withholding information, particularly negative feedback. Consultants, in turn, reported they often struggled to make use of the little feedback they did receive. Further, consultants and clients were not necessarily in alignment about what satisfaction means, or what a successful session looks like. As a result, the biggest and most obvious message (general praise!) was the only one consistently getting through. We therefore argue that writing center professionals should be cautious and intentional about their use of satisfaction surveys, particularly when using them to provide accurate client perspectives or as developmental tools for consultants. We also argue that writing center professionals should be transparent about these intentions and about surveys' limits when communicating with both clients and consultants about surveys or survey results.

We also argue that intentionality and transparency are not enough. Yes, clients should know who will be reading their responses (and why), and consultants should know what client survey responses likely are (and are not) communicating, but greater clarity alone is unlikely to eliminate clients' reticence to provide specific feedback or consultants' struggles to meaningfully use it, nor will it eliminate larger flaws and biases built into surveys as evaluative tools. Writing center professionals, therefore, need to look beyond the survey for ways to amplify client voices in assessment and consultant development and to ensure consultants hear and value clients' thinking.

## Methods

To learn as much as we could about the experiences and viewpoints of the two main populations who interact with the satisfaction survey administered by our writing center, we chose to conduct population-specific focus groups: two comprising clients who had taken the survey and two comprising consultants who had more than one semester of experience (and therefore had received and read sets of satisfaction survey results at some point during

employment).<sup>1</sup> We chose focus groups as our methodology because focus groups efficiently generate a variety of broad and nuanced perspectives from a wide range of participants. Like all methods, focus groups can also present limitations, as expressed viewpoints of individual participants are socially situated within the focus group and may not fully reflect their viewpoints outside of the group (Gibbs, 1997). For example, the dynamics of the consultant-populated focus groups we held were complicated by the fact that the participants had existing work relationships (and even friendships). Indeed, none of the focus group participants were speaking/listening outside of social contexts and larger systems of power that can determine who feels authorized to speak and when. Throughout our analysis, writing, and revision processes, we were consequently careful to pay attention to conversational patterns and dominance.

### Setting

Data were collected from four one-hour focus groups at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities over the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters. At the time of our writing, the university's Student Writing Support program, housed in the Center for Writing, typically conducted approximately 11,000 visits per year and had a consulting staff of about 55 undergraduate, graduate, and professional consultants. Immediately after every visit, clients received an email inviting them to take an optional anonymous student satisfaction survey about the session just completed (see Appendix A for the full text of the survey). Consultants received aggregated survey responses for applicable sessions once per semester.

### Participants and Selection Criteria

To obtain client participants, we emailed a questionnaire to clients who had completed at least one student satisfaction survey in the past and who would be on campus during data collection (N = 699). Of the 165 clients who responded to the questionnaire (24%), 27 indicated their interest in participating in a focus group (16%). Ultimately, we were able to schedule two client focus groups (N = 7 and N = 8 respectively); the focus group participants encompassed a wide range of clients, including one-time visitors and "frequent flyers," undergraduate and graduate students, and domestic and international students. We recognize the limitation of focusing only on clients who had filled out surveys previously (i.e., these students are a self-selecting group that believes surveys are meaningful); at the same time, our research sought to understand what survey-taking clients want to communicate and

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1 The study (STUDY00001106) received IRB approval under an Exempt determination on 08/24/17. Ongoing IRB review and approval for this study was not required.

what messages consultants receive from survey responses. Hearing from this specific population of clients was crucial.

Similarly, we wanted to hear from consultants who had previously interacted with survey responses that resulted from sessions they had conducted, so we drew consultant participants from a pool of those who had worked at the center for at least one semester, not including those on the research team (N = 39). Of those 39 consultants, 21 responded to the questionnaire (54%), and 15 of those indicated interest in participating in a focus group comprising fellow consultants (71%). For that population, we were able to schedule two consultant focus groups that involved a total of nine consultants (N = 5 and N = 4 respectively); these focus groups included consultants with writing center experience ranging from one semester to several years, many of whom also had classroom teaching experience.

### **Data Collection**

Each focus group discussion took place in a conference room specifically designed for focus group research so that the team could record the session while observing from outside the room. We paid an outside facilitator to lead all the focus groups because a session facilitated by coworkers, supervisors, or client participants' previous writing consultants who may have been involved in the research might have biased participants' responses (Morgan, 1997, p. 17). During each session, the facilitator asked questions of clients and consultants to prompt conversations about their respective experiences with the Center for Writing's student satisfaction survey or survey responses (see Appendix B for the client focus group protocol and questions and Appendix C for the consultant focus group protocol and questions). Client and consultant focus groups followed the same protocol with one exception: In the consultant focus groups, the facilitator distributed to each consultant a copy of the aggregated survey responses from the sessions they had conducted over the past year (which the consultants had already read at some point). Having the survey responses enabled consultant participants to read and respond directly to what clients wrote, not what they remembered having read over the course of their careers. All focus group conversations were video-recorded and transcribed and de-identified for analysis. The consultant focus groups were neither observed nor transcribed by authors who had supervisory responsibilities.

We transcribed the focus groups as faithfully as we could to capture as much of the content and feeling of the conversations as possible while also streamlining a process appropriate to our purpose. For example, we did not time pauses because we were not planning to do conversation analysis or to address power; similarly, we did not transcribe paralinguistic features such as gestures or facial expressions. However, we did transcribe filler words (such as "um," "uh," or "like") in order to capture the participants' speech, which



involved thinking aloud in the moment. To indicate intonation, we used traditional punctuation (such as commas, exclamation points, and question marks). In addition, we attempted as much as possible to transcribe moments of group interaction, such as when one or more of the focus group participants spoke up in agreement (e.g., an interjected “yes!” or “right!?”), or moments of shared laughter, which has a social function (Thonus, 2008) and therefore seemed especially significant in these small-group discussions devoted to shared meaning-making.

### **Data Analysis**

We analyzed our focus group transcripts using grounded theory methodology (Neff, 1998). In this approach, researchers begin to build an understanding of a phenomenon based on several passes through the data, noting emerging patterns and developing codes that reflect those patterns. Researchers then develop new theory by iteratively revising and applying these codes to the data. We chose this methodology because we wanted our findings to emerge inductively from participant responses.

Saldaña (2009) described a robust and flexible coding method that is congruent with the inductive nature of grounded theory and allows for a variety of coding techniques. We began our analysis with what Saldaña termed “exploratory coding methods” (p. 118) (e.g., holistic and provisional codes): After transcribing the two client and two consultant focus groups, all four of us read the full transcripts independently, taking notes and then discussing the preliminary themes we noticed emerging from the data. In moving back and forth between transcripts and our notes, we collaboratively created an initial coding list for the themes that arose persistently within and across the consultant and client focus groups. We then folded in “elemental coding methods” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 66) to uncover additional structural, descriptive, and process-related patterns in the focus group data. We drew on these patterns to refine and create definitions for each code, including quotations from the transcripts as examples and counterexamples.

Using the qualitative analysis software NVivo, we collaboratively coded each transcript multiple times to refine our codes and definitions. Each code was assigned to two researchers. To ensure that no one pair of researchers dominated how the codes took shape, pairings rotated for every code, and all researchers worked together at some point. After each coding pass, the pair returned to the full group, where we condensed or refined the initial codes and developed extended definitions. Through this process, the group produced the coded version of the data that we used to develop our findings.

## Findings

This section contains the most prominent impressions related to the survey uses and survey responses that emerged from the focus groups, first among our client participants and then among our consultant participants.

### Client Focus Groups

In the following section, we describe how client participants reported using surveys mainly to communicate positive in-session experiences. These clients indicated they wished they could use surveys to share the specific skills learned or grades obtained after the session. The participants noted they were reluctant to share negative experiences on the survey—when they did, they said they would temper their negative feedback. In all cases, client participants suggested they were especially attuned to consultants’ feelings and humanity.

#### ***What Clients Reported Communicating via the Survey***

Client participants in both focus groups overwhelmingly described session experiences as positive, and participants explained that they had wanted to share that positivity with consultants via the survey. These clients described their positive responses as ways of helping consultants “feel happy” (Rei)<sup>2</sup> or “receive my positive vigor” (Yan) by sharing joy: “After several times I used the writing center I actually feel really happy . . . so I [complete] the survey . . . so they will feel happy too” (Charlotte). Jay even described a desire to use the survey to buoy a consultant’s confidence. For example, noting that his consultant had mentioned being struck that Jay was “his father’s age,” Jay explained why he later filled out a post-session survey: “I don’t know if he had any, doubt, about how he came across? And so I wanted to, m- ensure that it was received positively what he did? And then, kind of, erase that, doubt, if he had it.” Beyond considering consultants’ feelings, clients in the focus groups saw survey responses as a way of encouraging consultants to keep doing specific helpful behaviors in the session—primarily for the participants’ own projects, but also for the support of other writers: “I just wrote like, two or three sentences, about like really good consultants who did very clear specific things that I think could help me or other people in the future” (Hannah).

#### ***What Clients Reported Wishing They Could Communicate via the Survey***

Focus group discussions revealed that in addition to sharing the positive feelings that arose from their interactions with consultants, client participants wanted to communicate session outcomes—the (largely) positive effects they

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2 All consultant and client participants were pseudonymized in our transcripts. When a participant did not choose their own pseudonym, we provided one. Similarly, when a participant did not share with us their gender pronouns of reference, we used singular *they* in brackets.

saw the session having on their written products. Client participants described wanting to use surveys to share the “direct result” (Sarah) of their sessions, such as getting an “A” on a paper or receiving a scholarship. Noting that they usually completed the survey before they finished their writing projects, clients in both focus groups wished for a second survey or other web form for them to communicate grades or other outcomes with consultants, both to share good news, such as one client, Tina, who said, “I’ve had papers where I’ve done, like, a hundred and twenty times better than I would, you know, if I wouldn’t have seen them,” and to provide positive reinforcement, which one client, Susan, hypothesized might be helpful for tutors: “I would, like, love that as a tutor getting like, ‘oh! I helped three people get ‘As’ on their essays this semester!” One participant, Lisa, did mention having received a lower-than-expected grade despite a positive experience in a session and suggested that such information might also be “helpful in some way” for the consultant.

In response to the question of whether the survey fulfilled its stated purpose of “improving our writing instruction,” client participants had several improvements in mind. The participants wished that the current survey provided more space for them to name specifics about what worked in their session, including what was learned and what “skills” they felt were developed. Client participants suggested that naming these skills not only would be another way of sharing positive experiences with our center but also would permit them to give consultants feedback to be used in work with other clients. For example, Sarah proposed adding a question “like, ‘tangibly what did you get out of it’ like ‘what skills did you acquire?’” because “that would be like a super, like f- concrete feedback that they could use and be like, ‘oh, people, feel felt like they learned this from me? I should always tell people about this’ like writing skill.” Reviewing question 8, “I learned something about writing that I will use in the future,” Eunah suggested, “if you have, like, a comment section under number 8, like, ‘if you have anything, you learned, that you could use in the future, specify it please.’ [Emphatic agreement from Tina.] Something like that. It would be e-, extremely helpful because, consultant would know that ‘oh, this actually helping students.”

### ***What Clients Reported Being Reluctant to Share in Their Surveys***

Despite the agreement of client focus group participants that they wanted their feedback to help the writing center and their writing consultant improve, and despite their overall positive experience with the writing center, they also conveyed reluctance to communicate negative feedback via the surveys. Although several participants cited time as a factor—it always takes more time to write a detailed critical comment than it does to write a short affirmative one—many of their thoughts about sharing negative feedback were rooted in their perceptions of what was not under the consultant’s control. For example, client Amy noted they wouldn’t comment about the overall process

of getting an appointment, something the survey asks about, because the consultant “can’t do anything about it.” Other participants acknowledged the possibility of an “off day”: both Jay and Tina said they would not write negative comments about a consultant who might be having “a bad day.” Finally, Yan described withholding negative responses because they recognized consultants are unique people with individual consulting styles, and they may merely have experienced a poor consultant-client match:

When I wa-, when I was having really, poor experience with one, consultant? I, usually feel like maybe that’s her or his style? that, doesn’t fit me? So I don’t, intending to put in suggestions because I don’t see nothing wrong with he or her strategy, it could be, just, I cannot buy in, or I cannot get that sense of, when I was having poor experience sometimes I skipped the survey.

In other words, Yan decided that there was no need to provide negative feedback on the consultant’s work when that work was simply different from what Yan preferred.

Several participants noted that they were reluctant to document a negative experience in a survey comment because it might make any future interactions with the same consultant uncomfortable even though participants were aware the survey was anonymous. The following conversation among four focus group members (punctuated by appreciative laughter from others in the group) reveals their sensitivity to the potential consequences of any negative survey comments:

Susan: Yeah, I feel like if I had a negative s-, experience, I’d feel weird about writing comments, if—

Yan: Me, too

Susan: cause I feel like

Rei: yeah

(others laughing)

Susan: they would be very obviously specific? too? and, it would be uncomfortable if I like, went back in? even

Lisa: Yeah!

Susan: if it were like I requested a different person—?

Lisa: Yeah! it might be awkward if I saw her again! (laughing)

Susan: like, seeing them? (laughing) Not that they proly remember, I’m sure you see like, so many people, but.

Here, Susan indicated she would feel uncomfortable at the mere sight of a consultant whom she had critiqued in an anonymous survey even as she discounted the probability of the consultant remembering her.

### **Consultant Focus Groups**

The findings that follow emerged from consultant participants' discussion of overall experiences with receiving individual aggregate survey responses. As we describe in this section, consultant participants reported receiving mainly positive survey feedback, which contained few specific or constructive comments. When consultants recalled using specific, negative survey feedback to interrogate their practices, consultants reported maintaining those practices but being more transparent to clients in terms of why those practices were being implemented. Consultants wished for more specific feedback from clients as well as feedback from others within the writing center with shared knowledge and values about consulting.

#### ***How Consultants Reported Using Received Survey Responses***

All consultants reported receiving overwhelmingly positive survey responses throughout their careers, whether those careers had spanned just one semester or several years. Many consultants described using their positive survey responses to affirm consulting practices and generate positive feelings: "I use [them] as a sense of pride to, you know, make me even more confident and happier and enjoyable to come to work" (Harry). Others qualified their reactions to their overall positive feedback. Jack, for example, described using the survey responses he received as "confirmation that I'm not really screwing things up, more than anything else," a comment met with affirming laughter from his fellow focus group members and an "I'm still okay!" from Alice. Lynn wished that her positive survey comments were more specific, saying, "None of the comments I receive ever tell me in a substantial way what I'm doing well." And Elissa, who characterized the survey comments she received as disappointingly short and "just ambiently good," jokingly speculated, "are we just using these to inflate my ego?"

While consultants reported receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from survey-taking clients, both consultant focus groups spent time discussing negative survey feedback. Some consultants either had never received negative feedback or had tended to dismiss the little negative feedback received, while others, particularly more experienced consultants, noted that negative survey comments prompted reflection about typical consulting practices or behaviors during specific sessions. Experienced consultant Kathy explained that when she received her feedback at the end of the semester, "I do look and the ones that seem unsatisfactory, I often use [them] as an opportunity to reflect, and then to think about my own practice." Kathy went on to say that it is "an uncomfortable process actually. I can remember three—three different times where it was very upsetting to get the comments, and I had to, work through those and work through my practice." When consultants were asked about a time when they changed something in their practice as a result of reading survey responses,

Harry volunteered a specific instance based on a recent survey comment. He read it aloud to the group:

“I was working on the chemistry lab formal write-up, and my advisor that helped me had very little science background. It would have been significantly more helpful if I had been matched with someone who was familiar with lab reports.”

After sharing the comment, Harry explained, “that’s not really anything I could help. I’m not a science guy, you know? That’s not me.” However, he quickly went on to acknowledge a subsequent change he implemented:

Let’s say I was sitting with someone and be like, “Hey, just to let you know, like, I’m not necessarily—I haven’t necessarily done lab reports here at the U, but I do want to let you know that what I can help with is the formality of writing, making sure it’s sounding professional.”

In this and other instances, consultants reported using specific negative survey comments they received to reflect on aspects of their practice that might have been unclear to a client.

### ***What Consultants Report as Limitations of Received Survey Responses***

Although they characterized some specific negative comments from clients as useful, consultants also noted an overall lack of specific feedback and questioned the value of the nonspecific survey responses that they received. In discussing the “ambiently good” comments she received, Elissa found that they were often not specific enough to evoke memories of her typical consulting practices or her behavior during specific sessions, saying, “I haven’t had very long comments, like nothing more than two sentences, so I look at them and, like, I’m not really sure what to reflect on.” Other consultants also commented on the absence of specific client narratives that would help them clarify their own perceptions of these sessions. Jack proposed that instead of using a survey, the writing center could try “sending people the reverse version of our comments after the visit that’s like ‘what happened in this session, what’s going to happen next?’” This idea of asking for writers’ own summaries of sessions was taken up eagerly by the focus group. Jack explained,

And so I might write in the “what happened” field [of our session notes], “I worked with student X on, um, proofreading a final draft before submitting it. We made some straightforward changes to tense and articles.” And what if that student feels like it was either, like, a really transformative session in which they grew as a writer, or they feel like I was massively disrespectful and, like, nitpicked. Lining it up with our feedback from the session would actually provide some meaningful way to get more than just, like, one comment out [of it]. . . . It would be interesting to know what they thought happened, what the client thought happened.

Even as consultants acknowledged that remembering session details became difficult after some time had passed, the consultants agreed that learning about

the specifics of a given consultation from the client's perspective—particularly in narrative form—would be very meaningful. Overall, consultants expressed a desire for more specific and contextualized feedback on their consulting practice.

Consultants also questioned how client satisfaction data can measure the success of a session meaningfully. Pointing to her positive survey responses, Lynn said,

In whatever happened here, they got what they wanted, right? I don't know whether or not that was a good thing or a bad thing. Like was it, like . . . Did I end up correcting all their articles, and that's what they wanted. Like that's not what I should be doing if that's what happened, and that's why they're happy.

In this moment, Lynn went beyond a desire for more specific and contextualized feedback and questioned the extent to which a client's goals and corresponding survey responses align with what consultants "should be doing" during a consulting session.

### ***What Kinds of Feedback Consultants Reported Wanting to Receive***

Despite our having planned for the survey itself to be the main topic of the focus groups, both consultant focus groups spent a significant amount of time proposing other avenues of feedback, particularly ways to receive feedback from the writing center's administrators and fellow consultants. For example, Andrew suggested, "I like the feedback from students . . . but I also really want feedback from folks who can, speak more directly to what I'm doing and how I'm doing it, like other consultants or, like, basically our directors." Alice also expressed her enthusiasm for "be[ing] observed" by a colleague, noting this practice would be valuable "because otherwise I just have me judging me in my head." In all, consultant focus group conversations explored a variety of ways to get feedback from coworkers, including 1. being observed by a director or other administrator; 2. being observed by a colleague; 3. observing a colleague with a different style to reflect on one's own typical practices; and 4. learning new consulting approaches by being a client.

## **Discussion**

Conversations in our client focus groups and writing consultant focus groups uncovered tensions both about the use of the survey and about each population's understanding of the purpose of a writing center. Below, we explore the tensions we found most compelling.

### **What Clients Could—and Could Not—Tell Us Through a Survey**

In analyzing how client participants used (and did not use) the survey, we were struck by the extent to which they moved beyond obvious consider-

ations, such as the amount of time needed to write specific feedback. The client participants were deeply attentive to the feelings and humanity of consultants as well as to what any negative survey response might mean for clients’ own ongoing relationship with the writing center. In addition to wanting to spread their positive feelings and reassure consultants, client participants also said they at times avoided providing negative feedback since the consultant could just be having an “off day” or since their experience could simply have resulted from a mismatch of client learning and consultant tutoring styles. Some client participants also noted inherent risks in providing specific negative feedback: the potential for them to be identified with their feedback and, thus, for potentially uncomfortable interactions with consultants in the future. Client participants indicated they felt that if they gave contextualized critical feedback, they would risk losing their anonymity. If they planned to have an ongoing relationship with Student Writing Support, providing negative feedback would risk damaging comfortable interpersonal relationships between themselves and members of Student Writing Support. Clients indicated these concerns resulted in a lack of specific negative feedback. In a sense, it seemed that the very quality that made client participants powerful sources of feedback—namely, their thoughtful and nuanced manner of discussing their experiences in writing consultations—also had the potential to limit their survey feedback.

### **How Consultants Processed Client Feedback**

Although consultants indicated they appreciated the positive feelings survey responses could inspire, we noticed that consultants frequently expressed disappointment about the lack of detail or specificity in the written comments. Consultants reported receiving very few written comments, and they often characterized those they did receive as short, such as Elissa, who indicated they were “nothing more than two sentences”; decontextualized, such as Nick, who said, “I dunno, like I dunno who this was, I dunno what I did wrong”; and positive, such as Elissa, who noted, “I have a comment that just says ‘good,’ one word, no punctuation.” Lynn, a consultant who received far more written comments and conducted a larger number of appointments per semester than the majority of the other consultants, still reported frustration with the ability of survey responses to provide meaningful feedback, saying,

Like out of 50 [comments], one was helpful. That doesn’t actually bode very well for what this is doing for me, does it? [Laughter] Other than what Harry said of like making me feel good about myself for the good ones.

In other words, even when written comments were present, consultants indicated they felt that the comments yielded little meaningful feedback.

When consultants did receive more specific feedback, they said they felt more prepared to reflect on it and apply it to their work, mostly through



explaining their practice to clients. For example, Harry said when he perceived from survey feedback that a student had hoped for him to be what Harry called “a science guy,” he responded by adding transparency to his practice. In other words, Harry indicated he perceived specific negative survey feedback as evidence of a dissonance between writer and consultant expectations, and he therefore used that feedback to manage subsequent clients’ expectations.

Thus, survey comments, even the most specific and contextualized ones, can prompt reflection that results in increasing transparency—but not necessarily in a fundamental re-thinking of practice. For example, the one comment that Lynn said she found useful was very specific, and she paraphrased it for the group: “She said I went over the allotted time to rewrite her paper in my own words. In my own words.” When Lynn first read the comment, she said she remembered that it “cut like a knife through [her] heart.” Despite this strong reaction, Lynn said her main adjustment to her practice was to increase transparency rather than to make more substantial changes. She recalled her thought process:

Well, I know what the session was, and I know what happened. Like I just got caught up in reading and was making comments. And—I had—Like I had to think about—because—Um, a big part of the way I think through writing and working with students is, like, sometimes I have to write my thoughts out—down to think them through. And so I’ve had to be, like, really careful about making sure that I’m saying like, “I’m going to write this down for a second just to think it through, and then we’ll talk.”

Of course, Lynn’s decision to increase transparency is understandable, even admirable. She likely wanted to be “careful” of writers’ feelings, and her increased transparency actually put into practice an important element of writing center pedagogy: Lynn indicated she demystified her own process and communicated that her full attention was on the writer’s ideas, thus underscoring the value that writers are thinkers who have agency over their own texts. In Lynn’s case, her decision to be more transparent about taking notes suggests this practice was integrated smoothly into her consultations; however, what if the practice in question, for example, a consultant lecturing a writer, were one that needed radical rethinking, not increased transparency? Would a survey comment about that practice prompt a consultant to fundamentally change? Our data suggest that survey responses alone are unlikely to catalyze substantial consultant growth.

### **Connecting Consultant Desires and Client Perspectives**

We are left with several dilemmas. One is that at the same time that consultants said client feedback left them hungry for something more substantial, those few clients who completed surveys and who participated in our

focus groups said the survey itself made it difficult for them to provide that substantial feedback. Part of this problem may lie in survey-takers’ conception of “substantial feedback,” which seems to include tying the success of writing center consultations to the grades clients saw as resulting from sessions, information not at hand when completing the survey. This leads to another dilemma, which is that consultants did not mention wondering about grades or other outcomes; rather, consultants indicated they craved additional feedback about what the writer experienced *during their time together*, even if that experience was negative. Furthermore, the very type of negative feedback consultants said they wished they had—specifics about what a writer felt went wrong in a session—is what client participants indicated they were reluctant to write if they planned to have an ongoing relationship with Student Writing Support. We articulate these dilemmas not to devalue satisfaction surveys completely but rather to emphasize client and consultant ideas about how to inform or expand a “satisfaction survey only” feedback system.

One way to give the consultants what they want is to provide additional feedback from colleagues and supervisors: people whom consultants believe could recognize effective practices. Consultants mentioned wanting more regular observations by supervisors or colleagues precisely because these fellow staff members “can speak more directly to what I’m doing and how I’m doing it” (Andrew). As Hall (2017) argued, “writing centers ought to make direct observations a centerpiece of our work” (p. 26) since observations by supervisors and colleagues can spark conversations about shared values and practices. However, feedback from supervisors and colleagues cannot capture clients’ unique perceptions of what happens in their sessions. The clients in our focus groups engaged in strikingly nuanced and complex discussions centered on everything from interpersonal client-consultant relationships, to the role of a writing center, to the individual goals of clients as writers and students.

Consultants who only hear from these clients via a survey have no way of knowing what rich feedback these clients are actually prepared to give in other settings. Indeed, one consultant, Jack, who noted the biases associated with survey feedback in general and the limitations of feedback that comes only from survey-takers, proposed asking supervisors to gather client feedback by interviewing a randomly selected subset of each consultant’s clients. Jack explained, “I feel like that more purposeful and limited sampling might be less biased and more holistic and provide some [useful] feedback.” In the focus groups, client voices revealed the nuanced, more reflective thinking behind the written comments that can appear flat on surveys themselves. We believe that by listening to discussions (e.g., interviews, focus groups, etc.) of engaged clients, consultants could learn, as we did, that those clients can provide thoughtful commentary on what happens in a writing consultation. Although consultants might not get feedback on their own consulting styles from inter-

views or focus groups, consultants would gain a new lens through which to read and understand the origins of any survey feedback received.

### **What Conversations About Surveys Revealed About Values and Beliefs**

As the client and consultant focus group participants reflected on their experiences interacting with the survey, their commentary revealed some of their fundamental beliefs about writing center work. Christopher LeCluyse (2013) and Hall (2017) both argued that examining writing center documents allows us to uncover embedded beliefs about writing center work. We found that surveys are no exception. Because satisfaction surveys already articulate these values and beliefs, surveys provide a framework for readers, in our case, client and consultant focus group participants, to affirm or push back against these values.

In particular, we were struck by two ideas that emerged in the client focus groups. First, clients not only focused on their own experiences, including their connections with consultants, “skills” learned, or grades or other outcomes associated with the session, but also were invested in the writing center experience for other users. Some client participants wished they could specify the “skills” they learned so that, in Eunah’s words, “consultants would know that ‘oh this is actually helping students—and then they’re gonna do it again!’” Building on Eunah’s proposal, Tina further imagined consultants sharing this feedback with each other: “Maybe we should all start teaching this—or suggesting this.” Client participants therefore saw their comments as being valued not only by the consultant they met with but also by Student Writing Support consultants more broadly.

Second, client participants, despite being a self-selecting population, were far from homogeneous in their views of writing center work. Client participants had complicated views about, for example, the relationship between session outcomes (grades) and the value of writing center sessions. Although some participants did describe feeling “less satisfied” with a session after they received a lower grade than they had expected, others pushed back, arguing that writers, not consultants, were responsible for their own texts and that consultants could not be expected to anticipate what instructors might do. These conversations productively complicated the idea that clients primarily tie satisfaction to grades (as in Morrison & Nadeau, 2003), and the comments revealed the wide-ranging ways that clients conceptualized their roles as learners and writing center users.

Consultant focus-group discussions of the satisfaction survey also revealed the consultants’ conceptions of and relationships with writing center work, particularly in the discussion of the client–consultant relationship. For example, one of the consultant focus groups pondered the language framing

the whole survey prompt, “to improve how we serve you.” Lynn critiqued the “consumer society feel” of this prompt, saying,

I always frame it as a conversation about their writing. I never frame it as like, [posh tone] “How can I serve you today?” You know? I don’t know. It just feels like the wrong, impression. It gives me the wrong impression of the relationship.

Other consultants nodded in response to Lynn’s observation. The nature of the client-consultant relationship came up in both consultant focus groups as consultants described their initial reactions to survey responses. The consultants all paid special attention to one of the Likert questions in particular, “The consultant was respectful of me and my writing.” For example, Elissa went so far as to say, “If I got something negative in that, I would feel very bad, I’d feel awful, I’d want to evaluate how I’ve been looking at everyone’s writing.” And Harry explained he ranked the “respect” item above other survey items more directly related to writing support because

if you can respect [the writer] as a human being and be empathetical with them and, you know, very thoughtful of your language of describing their writing, . . . I think it can make almost all consultations go pretty well.

The discussion around this Likert question reveals these consultants intensely valued the interpersonal elements of writing center work. In this conversation, consultants’ prioritizing of “respect” over all other elements of the consultation—combined with discomfort with statements such as “improve how we serve you”—revealed that the consultants conceived of writing center work as less transactional and more relational. While clients also described relationships as important considerations when responding to the satisfaction survey, we noticed conversations often returned to “skills,” grades, or other more concrete session outcomes, highlighting the different criteria by which consultants and clients might evaluate the success of a session.

## Implications and Conclusions

We want to recognize that, despite their shortcomings, satisfaction surveys will remain a cornerstone of administrative practice. Compelling stories of student satisfaction, such as overwhelmingly positive responses to Likert statements about student learning and glowing comments conveying engagement and excitement about this resource’s role in students’ educational experiences, permit writing center administrators to assure stakeholders that this student service is a good use of institutional resources. In other words, if surveys are useful, *really*, for anyone, they serve the needs of writing center professionals as they justify their writing center’s existence. However, since previous studies on satisfaction surveys and on student evaluations of teaching have revealed issues

of bias against women (Bertakis, Franks, & Azari, 2003; MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2015; Wallace, Lewis, & Allen, 2019; Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2022), people of color (Cooper, Roter, Johnson, Ford, Steinwachs, & Powe, 2003; Merritt, 2008; Wallace, Lewis, & Allen, 2019), and people perceived to be non-native speakers of English (Saunders, 2001; Abayadeera, Mihret, & Hewa Dulige, 2018; Lei & Du, 2021), it seems likely that writing center satisfaction surveys contain similar biases. The student satisfaction survey, therefore, remains a problematic mode of communicating writing center values to clients and evaluating individual consultants. Creating genuine professional development for consultants and hearing meaningful feedback from clients will require more equitable and expansive approaches.

### **Ways to Improve Satisfaction Survey Practices**

Given that many writing centers, including ours, will likely still include surveys in assessment practices, we propose a few suggestions for ways that writing center professionals can facilitate more meaningful interactions with surveys for clients and with survey responses for consultants.

#### ***Be Explicit With Clients About Survey Purpose, Timing, and Audience***

Writing center administrators need to be explicit for clients about the purpose, timing, and audience of satisfaction surveys. Regardless of whether surveys are given in print or online, right after the session or hours later, anonymously or not, clients still need to know when and how often consultants receive survey feedback. For example, if Student Writing Support's clients knew that consultants received aggregated survey responses just once per semester, clients might be keener to provide more detail. Clients also need to know what their survey feedback will be used for. For example, if a survey's stated purpose is generally "to improve our writing instruction," clients do not know what shape that improvement takes. Do a client's survey responses affect a consultant's employment status? Are they shared only with administrators? Only with the consultant? Survey-taking clients need this information in order to provide the feedback our study shows they want to give.

#### ***Be Explicit With Consultants About Survey Purpose and Audience***

Writing center administrators need to be explicit with consultants about the purpose and audience of satisfaction surveys. Writing center professionals need to explain that these results serve an important administrative purpose, namely, to provide a generalized vision of the value of writing centers for students, and that these surveys exist within a system rife with deeply ingrained power imbalances and biases that such surveys can further uphold. Writing center professionals should therefore also clarify that the survey was *not* designed for evaluating individual consultants and that consultants' continued employment does not hinge on survey results. More transparency about the nonevaluative purpose for individual consultants might facilitate more produc-

tive engagement with survey results. First, awareness that the survey solicits feedback on an institutionally idealized vision of center work—a vision that may or may not entirely align with what clients and consultants value—could help consultants approach their often overwhelmingly positive responses with more skepticism and more awareness of what the results do *not* reveal (more on this topic follows). Second, if consultants were to associate less evaluative pressure with the survey, they might feel more receptive to the rare negative comment.

### ***Provide a Clear Overview of Survey Tendencies***

Writing center administrators need to help consultants understand who takes satisfaction surveys and what clients tend to include or omit. In centers with optional satisfaction surveys, writing center professionals must openly acknowledge to consultants that survey-taking clients do not necessarily represent all clients and, therefore, survey responses are not generalizable to all clients. Clients who do not see satisfaction surveys as a productive or meaningful mode of giving feedback, not to mention those who feel pressed for time, likely do not fill out optional satisfaction surveys. What surveys can tell us is about the experiences of clients who are willing to offer feedback via a survey but who are generally hesitant to share negative experiences in surveys for a variety of reasons. These clients’ attentiveness to the interpersonal relationships involved in a consultation and their sensitivity to the human fallibility of a consultant on any given day might contribute to overwhelmingly positive survey responses. Even in centers where all clients are required to complete post-session satisfaction surveys, it is important to consider how those clients understand their relationship with the center or with a particular consultant. As our focus groups revealed, many survey-taking clients imagine themselves in an ongoing relationship with the center, such that what clients say (especially if it is negative) could make future experiences there “awkward.”

### ***Additional Kinds of Feedback***

Writing centers also need to find additional ways for consultants to receive specific, constructive, and informed feedback that incorporates clients’ perspectives. Here we present a few possibilities.

#### ***Session Observations and Post-Observation Discussions With Administrators and/or Peers***

One rich source of feedback is the kind consultants themselves requested: session observations by writing center administrators and/or peers. Another could be structured co-mentoring teams of consultants who rotate observations and discussions of individual sessions. Consultants could also be encouraged to reflect briefly after every session, perhaps by adding a reflective portion to post-session comments, as suggested by Rebecca Nowacek, Andrew

Hoffmann, Carolyne Hurlburt, Lisa Lamson, Sareene Proodian, & Anna Scanlon (2019).

### ***Client-Supplied Post-Session Comments***

If given opportunities beyond completing a survey, clients themselves could offer more powerful sources of feedback, we believe—especially considering clients' regard for consultants and thoughtfulness about the purpose of sessions. One possibility is to involve clients in writing post-session comments. For example, Margaret Weaver (2001) proposed having clients and consultants create "jointly told tales" (p. 49) by writing session notes together, thereby making clients "active participants in the creation of knowledge . . . when they walk out of our writing centers" (p. 51). Similarly, we could take up Jack's suggestion and ask clients to write and submit their own session notes after they leave. Like consultant session notes, these client session notes (which would require training consultants to facilitate this tricky genre) could be descriptive and nonevaluative; consultants could later compare their own notes to clients' to expand their understanding of what happened in a session. Another possibility is to train clients to be observers of others' sessions. Those untrained in formal writing center theory can be a source of good questions and fresh perspectives on our own day-to-day work, just as disciplinary outsiders can be insightful audiences for a piece of writing. Whether writing session descriptions or conducting observations, clients would need to be compensated for their valuable labor.

### ***New Ways to Assess Consultants' and Clients' Values and Goals About Writing Consultations***

When interacting with satisfaction surveys and results, clients and consultants often have different priorities that shape the ways feedback is given and received. If writing centers are to approach assessment in new ways that more fully represent the interests of both clients and consultants, we need to learn more about each population's values and goals (Salem, 2016), and both populations should be involved in designing assessment methods and documents. For example, writing center professionals could ask consultants and clients to share thoughts on what is worth assessing (and writing centers could pay clients and consultants for time spent writing and thinking). Specifically, clients could write their own writing center philosophy, including what they believe are the roles of the center, the consultants, and the clients, which could then be shared anonymously with consultants and administrators. In turn, consultants and administrators could also write philosophies and share them anonymously with participating clients. Each population then might be invited separately to identify and discuss sites of agreement or disagreement. These conversations would provide a basis for generating new assessments that take into account both consultant and client priorities. Centers could also position clients as part

of a research team to further investigate center assessment, ensuring that client voices participate in shaping the center’s assessment practices.

Ultimately, we need to make both clients and consultants central to assessing our work. While it might be tempting simply to aim for more satisfaction survey responses from a larger swath of writing center users (i.e., make the online survey mandatory or very strongly encouraged for all clients), even centers which have mandatory or very strongly encouraged exit surveys do not necessarily get much qualitative negative feedback that can help consultants improve (Hedengren & Lockerd, 2017). Thus, we propose regularly developing and researching with our consultants different avenues to elicit clients’ beliefs, values, and experiences with writing center work. We have proposed several such avenues, but we do not yet know whether they would generate meaningful outcomes for clients or consultants. All this is to say we believe future research should not prioritize rewriting survey items or rethinking the timing or mode of their delivery; rather, the goal should be to amplify client voices and enable consultants to learn from clients in meaningful ways.

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## Appendix A

### Student Writing Support Satisfaction Survey<sup>3</sup>

Thank you for using the Center for Writing's Student Writing Support program in Nicholson Hall. To help us improve our service, please tell us about your recent consultation on [visit date inserted] with consultant [consultant name inserted]. This 11-question survey takes about 5 minutes to complete. All individual responses will be kept confidential.

1. When was your paper/project due in relation to your consultation at Student Writing Support?
  - Same day
  - Next day

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3 This is the student satisfaction survey used by our writing center's main location on campus. Surveys for other locations on campus and for online appointments vary slightly with regards to questions about checking in for appointments and visiting other writing center locations.

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- 2-6 days
  - A week or more
2. The process of making an appointment was easy.
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]
3. I felt welcomed when I checked in at the front desk.
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]
4. The consultant addressed my needs and concerns.
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]
5. I understood the consultant's comments about my work.
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]
6. The consultant was respectful of me and my writing.
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]
7. After the session, I felt I had a clear idea of what I would do next on my paper/project.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]

8. I learned something about writing that I will use in the future.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]

9. I will visit Student Writing Support again.

- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  - Not applicable/don't know
- Comments: [text box]

10. Would you visit our writing consultants at any of the following locations? (Please check all that apply)

- Appleby Hall
- SWS.online
- I would not visit either of these other locations.

11. Comments and suggestions:

[text box]

## Appendix B

### Client Focus Group Protocol and Questions

#### Protocol

- a. Facilitator will distribute Study Information Sheets and allow time for participants to read them.
- b. Facilitator will ask participants what questions they have about the study, reminding them that they can always ask questions later, using the contact information on the Study Information Sheet.

- c. Facilitator will ask each participant to say their name and (as an icebreaker) the place they'd most like to be right now if they could be anywhere. The facilitator will model these questions and answers first.
- d. Facilitator will distribute a print copy of a blank Student Satisfaction Survey.

### Questions

Facilitator: For these first few questions, I'd like to get everyone's answers just to get a sense of how everyone uses Student Writing Support.

1. How often/how many times have you visited Student Writing Support?  
How often do/did you fill out the survey? Possible answers:
  - I visited once and filled it out once
  - I visited multiple times and filled it out once
  - I visited multiple times and filled it out after some visits
  - I visited multiple times and filled it out after most visits
  - I visited multiple times and filled it out after every visit
2. Why do you choose to take or not take the survey after a session?

Facilitator: We will now move into the more open discussion part of the focus group. I will ask questions to prompt conversations about Student Writing Support's Satisfaction Survey. You do not have to answer every question, and feel free to respond to others' comments with your own thoughts and opinions. Also, feel free to talk about specific experiences you have had with Student Writing Support and the Satisfaction Survey.

3. Why do you think that Student Writing Support sends satisfaction surveys?
4. How do you think that survey results are used by writing consultants, administrators, or anyone else?
5. How do you use the survey? What do you try to communicate? What kinds of comments do you leave?
6. How accurate/honest are your responses? What, if anything, do you hesitate to write on the survey, and why?
  - a. **Possible follow-up:** Can you think of a time you had a particularly positive experience at Student Writing Support? How, if at all, did you communicate your experience on the Survey?
  - b. **Possible follow-up:** Can you think of a time you had a particularly negative experience at Student Writing Support? How, if at all, did you communicate your experience on the Survey?

7. The stated purpose of the survey is to help Student Writing Support “improve how we serve you by highlighting things we are doing well and ways in which we can improve our writing instruction.” To what extent does the survey help you communicate what SWS consultants are doing well? To what extent does it help you communicate how they could improve their writing instruction?
8. What else, if anything, do you wish the survey asked? Is there anything you would wish to tell writing consultants that you cannot communicate on the survey?
9. How or when else would you like to give feedback to Student Writing Support or to your writing consultant?

## Appendix C

### Consultant Focus Group Protocol and Questions

#### Protocol

- a. Facilitator will distribute Study Information Sheets and allow time for participants to read them.
- b. Facilitator will ask participants what questions they have about the study, reminding them that they can always ask questions later, using the contact information on the Study Information Sheet.
- c. Facilitator will ask each participant to say their name and how long they have worked at Student Writing Support.

#### Questions

Facilitator: We will now move into the more open discussion part of the focus group. I will ask questions to prompt conversations about Student Writing Support’s Satisfaction Survey and Survey Responses. You do not have to answer every question, and feel free to respond to others’ comments with your own thoughts and opinions. Also, feel free to talk about specific experiences you have had with Student Writing Support and the Satisfaction Survey.

1. Why do you think that Student Writing Support sends out a satisfaction survey after every session? Who do you think uses the survey responses, and how?
2. Why do you think clients choose to take or not take the survey?
3. [*Facilitator distributes previous survey responses.*] Take a look at your previous survey responses from the 2016–17 academic year. What strikes you when you look at these survey responses?

4. How, if at all, have you used your own survey responses?
5. Can you tell us about a time when you changed your practice as a result of reading something in your surveys?
6. The stated purpose of the survey is to help Student Writing Support “improve how we serve you by highlighting things we are doing well and ways in which we can improve our writing instruction.” To what extent does the survey help highlight what you are doing well? To what extent does it help you improve your writing instruction?
7. What else, if anything, do you wish the survey asked? What other questions for clients or modes of client feedback might you want?
8. How or when else would you like to receive feedback on your work at Student Writing Support?

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