Over the past ten years or so, much has been written about whether writing center tutors should be generalists or specialists: when tutors help clients from other disciplines, is it an asset for the tutors to be familiar with discipline-specific discourse conventions? Scholarship attempting to answer this question has been bi-polar: either tutors should be generalists, or they should be specialists. On the specialist side, some scholars argue that tutors’ knowledge of discipline-specific discourse conventions is important to the success of tutoring sessions, since the tutoring should revolve around the rhetoric of the discipline (Kiedaisch and Dinitz; Tinberg and Cupples; Shamoon and Burns). Judith Powers and Jane Nelson, for example, argue that [t]he problems of brainstorming, drafting, and revising exist in the context of disciplines with complex histories, assumptions, and forms; they also exist in the context of the individual professors who interpret those disciplinary assumptions and set the specific objectives for their students. (13)

According to these arguments, specialists can help clients from their fields learn discourse strategies in more productive ways than generalist tutors, who are not familiar with different disciplines’ “domain-appropriate rhetoric” (Shamoon and Burns 147).

In contrast, Susan Hubbuch states that the “ignorant [or generalist] tutor’s major objective must necessarily be simply to comprehend the student’s ideas” (27), and this situation is beneficial, since the tutor cannot prematurely suggest ways to revise the paper, based on his/her experience.

The author wishes to thank Tom Smith and The Writing Center Journal reviewers for their feedback during revisions of this paper.
in the field. Other scholars agree with Hubbuch that generalist tutors force clients from other fields to articulate discipline-specific knowledge, therefore allowing clients to learn the discourse of their fields better. The fact that tutors do not have the same discipline-specific knowledge is therefore an asset. Generalist tutors also provide clients with the opportunity to work with someone outside their field; this interaction can allow tutors to contribute feedback different from that of discipline-specific tutors. (See Devet, et al, Healy, Luce, and Pemberton for further discussion of these issues.)

Polarizing tutor qualifications in this manner focuses on the administrative issues of whom to hire and what type of writing center to establish (one composed of generalist tutors, specialists, or both). This polarization accepts the status quo of tutors’ qualifications, ignoring the fact that in some cases generalists can be specialists and vice versa. In addition, focusing on whether to hire generalist and/or specialist tutors puts tutors in labeled boxes, an over-simplification which subverts opportunities to explore tutors’ abilities to work with all clients.

Instead of polarizing the issue, I suggest that generalist/specialist tutor arguments be restructured around tutor training theory and its relationship to social constructionism. A valuable theory foundational to writing center studies, social constructionism (as discussed by Bizzell, Bruffee, Ede, and Lunsford) advocates the social construction of knowledge, the collaborative processes involved in learning. Shamoon and Burns point out that social constructionism has not been able to change writing center practice: participants in the generalist/specialist debate have indicated theoretical knowledge of social constructionism but have not moved beyond it. In order to restructure this debate, I propose that genre theory, as it has evolved from social constructionism, provides “generalists” and “specialists” with a tool to analyze discipline-specific discourse. In addition to expanding the theoretical framework of writing center studies, genre theory offers a practical method for incorporating social constructionism into tutor training.

My goal here is to find some middle ground between the poles of generalist and specialist through tutor training theory and pedagogy, to propose ways that generalist tutors might learn more about the discourse of other disciplines. In addition, specialists need to be trained to remember the ways they learned to write for their fields so that they can assist novice writers in their disciplines. By helping specialists focus on what features of discourse novices are learning, writing center administrators can ensure tutors are asking the right questions, ones which lead the novice writers to learn for themselves what kind of features the discourse of their field requires and why. By applying genre theory, tutors can move away from the oppositional poles of generalist and specialist and toward a more unified goal of addressing all clients’ specific writing needs.

Background

First, I’d like to establish some context for the discussion that follows by describing the events that led to my using genre theory to direct a writing center. I am the assistant director of a writing center in the Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) Department in the College of Engineering at the University of South Carolina (USC). When this discipline-specific writing center was established in September, 1995, the director, Elisabeth Alford, staffed the center with two Ph.D. students with backgrounds in English and Composition and Rhetoric (including myself). As the center has grown, three additional graduate English consultants have been added. In 1996, a technical consultant with background in ECE was added.

I remember the anxiety involved in establishing this discipline-specific writing center: we wanted to know what the ECE faculty expected of us, we wanted to know what students’ needs prompted the faculty (mainly, the department chair) to establish a writing center, and we wondered what the conventions of ECE writing were. Unfortunately, no one in the department was able to give us very specific answers to our questions. The department chair knew businesses had been complaining that USC’s engineering graduates could not write and that engineering education was focusing more on communication skills. Based on these facts and his beliefs in current engineering education theory, he decided to establish a writing center.

Our first experiences with engineering writing were intimidating. All of us as tutors had had some experience with writing and teaching technical and business writing, so the conventions of headings, clear concise language, and charts and tables did not surprise us. What did disorient us was that we could not understand much of what we were reading. Below is an example of a paragraph from a report written for an introductory lab course, which illustrates the technical nature of ECE writing:

The probe for Channel 1 is connected to Node 1 and probe for Channel 2 to Node 2. The oscilloscope is set to alternate mode and both traces are viewed. The time when the rising edge of the Node 1 voltage is 80% of the way from the low quasi-steady-state voltage to the high quasi-steady-state voltage is defined as t=0. The amount of time that elapses before the Node 2 voltage reaches 80% of the high quasi-steady-state value is calculated to be 4 microseconds. The spike of the waveform does not cross the 80% level.
Since none of us had background in ECE, we were baffled about responding to this kind of scientific writing. Yes, we were aware of “generic” principles such as organization, transitions, and audience considerations, and we implemented such suggestions in our tutoring sessions. But we felt unsatisfied with these general principles. We wondered if we were adequately preparing these ECE students for writing in their discipline, since we did not know anything about ECE. Learning more about the form and to some extent the content of this writing became a goal for us. And, because our writing center was discipline-specific, we had the luxury of a clear, narrow focus for our learning efforts.

About six months after the writing center opened, I was attempting to find a dissertation topic. Since my work in the writing center involved learning more about engineering writing, I decided to focus on this discipline-specific discourse. As I tried to find a theoretical framework in which to situate my study of engineering writing, genre theory rose to the surface as a theory that would allow me to address social constructionist issues regarding these students’ processes of learning writing, and it would allow me to concretely analyze lab reports to determine essential generic characteristics.

Social Constructionism and Genre Theory

In this paper, I use the term social constructionism to refer to the movement in composition and writing center theory that highlights collaborative processes. This movement also stresses the social nature of becoming part of a discourse community, since communicating with experienced members of the discourse community is necessary in order for novice communicators to learn effective disciplinary discourse strategies.

Within the last twenty-five years, genre theory has returned to an emphasis on the social, the processes by which communicators learn to use genres of their fields. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell were some of the first scholars to redirect genre theory back to its social, rhetorical roots (as opposed to previous work by literary scholars—such as Fowler, Marino, and Strelka—that focused on form alone). Jamieson and Campbell focused on audience and the goals the writer/speaker wanted to accomplish through a particular genre, a focus which recognized the role of the speaker/writer as a social actor within communicative situations. Other scholars such as Bakhtin and Carolyn Miller emphasized the social nature of genres and the social action they accomplish. In order for communicators to accomplish goals within a discipline, therefore, they must use the socially accepted forms of communicating within their field. This social nature of genres also has been addressed in the form of systemic functional linguistics by Australian and British linguists (Callaghan, Cope and Kalantzis, Dixon, Green, Halliday, Kress, Macken and Slade, Martin, Reid, Rothery, Sawyer and Watson, and Swales). Critiquing traditional and progressivist education theories, these genre theory proponents challenge the idea that literacy occurs “naturally.” The Australian genre school encourages modeling and explicit teaching of genres, thereby creating easier access to privileged discourses of academia. In her essay “The Writing Center and Social Constructionist Theory,” Christina Murphy cautions against compositionists, writing center directors, and tutors embracing social constructionist theory totally without realizing its exclusion of individual ways of knowing and learning. This criticism is addressed through genre theory’s dual focus of communicating not only as an individual but also with a larger community.

Because of its emphasis on disciplinary discourse conventions, genre theory has recently been highlighted by Writing in the Disciplines (WID) scholars. (See e.g., Charles Bazerman, Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin, Cheryl Geisler, Carolyn Matalene, Carolyn Miller, Robert Schwegler and Linda Shamoon, Jack Selzer, and Dorothy Winsor.) In their book, Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication, Berkenkotter and Huckin discuss a “sociocognitive” (x) theory of genre. They write:

We use the term genre knowledge to refer to an individual’s repertoire of situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations—from immediate encounters to distanced communication through the medium of print, and more recently, the electronic media. One way to study the textual character of disciplinary communication is to examine both the situated actions of writers, and the communicative systems in which disciplinary actors participate. (ix)

Here, these scholars advocate studying individual as well as group socialization processes.

Throughout their book, Berkenkotter and Huckin illustrate the ways individuals come to learn socially the processes of communicating in their fields. One chapter, “News Value in Scientific Journal Articles,” discusses how scientists have adapted to the recent boom of information as a result of technology. Scientists no longer read scientific journal articles as thoroughly as before, especially when they read within their specialization; therefore, writers now highlight the important information earlier in the articles. By studying the reading patterns of these scientists, Berkenkotter and Huckin believe they have gained insight into the
practices within the discourse community of scientists. Such information can be passed on to students who need to learn the genre of scientific writing.

Similarly, Dorothy Winsor focuses on the ways individual students learn technical writing. In *Writing Like an Engineer: A Rhetorical Education*, Winsor’s chapter titles—“Socialization through Writers and Genres,” “Learning to Construct and Interact with an Audience,” “The Textual Negotiation of Corporate ‘Reality,’” and “Writing Like an Engineer”—illustrate the social focuses of this work. Winsor argues that students need mentors as they learn to write for an unfamiliar discourse community. For example, in “Socialization through Writers and Genres,” Winsor discusses Jason, a co-op student assigned to write a test report for a customer. As Jason wrote the report, his unfamiliarity with the history the company had with the customer became clear to Mark, his supervisor, who knew that the customer had had a difficult relationship with his company. So the language of the report had to be worded more delicately for this particular audience. Mark edited Jason’s report, and this process eventually led to Jason’s heightened awareness of the “rhetorical context” of his writing (21-27).

This example in particular coincides with Shamoon’s and Burn’s directive-tutoring argument:

> Over and over in the informal reports of our colleagues we find that crucial information about a discipline and about writing is transmitted in ways that are intrusive, directive, and product-oriented, yet these behaviors are not perceived as an appropriation of power or voice but instead as an opening up of those aspects of practice which had remained unspoken and opaque. (139)

Focusing on the written product has long been shunned by composition theory, but in WID, where students are being trained to write for their professions, writing certainly is a product; oftentimes, monetary decisions are made based on the quality of a written product (such as a proposal).

While these illustrations demonstrate how current genre theory is compatible with the theories that inform our collaborative practice in writing centers, the theory also provides a means to include the writer’s working individually. Each student must learn for him/herself the processes of becoming initiated into a particular discourse community; this is where a writing center tutor can be most helpful by serving as a guide in this process.4

The Politics of Literacy: How Applying Genre Theory Helps Writers Gain Voices within the Academy

The academy defines literacy often in ways that exclude other cultures’ or groups’ ways of defining it. In order for writers to learn academic discourse conventions and, therefore, literacy within their field, they need to communicate with experienced communicators. And if those communicators—intentionally or otherwise—do not enable that communication to take place, new voices within the academy will continue to be marginalized.5 Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis emphasize in their book, *The Powers of Literacy*, “that literacy teaching, if it is to provide students with equitable social access, needs to link the different social purposes of language in different contexts to predictable patterns of discourse” (67).

Supporting this argument, Mike Callaghan, Peter Knapp, and Greg Noble write:

> A key insight of genre theory is that language occurs in a social context and that it is structured according to the purposes it serves in a particular context and according to the social relations entailed by that activity. (181)

These writers discuss modeling product and social context as ways to introduce students to genres (181). Explicit teaching of genres within a discussion of social context (which can occur through the social interaction between a writing center tutor and client) describes a more directive form of teaching, a kind of teaching that Shamoon and Burns advocate:

> We need to keep in mind the crucial cognitive, social, and rhetorical changes students undergo as they strive to become proficient writers in the academy. The writing center could better help to facilitate these developments by serving as a site where directive tutoring provides a sheltered and protected time and space for practice that leads to the accumulation of important repertoires, the expression of new social identities, and the articulation of domain-appropriate rhetoric. Furthermore, if the crucial difference between novice and advanced expertise is the development of rhetorical practices, then writing centers could be the site where instructors from a variety of disciplines articulate and demonstrate these practices, so that students may observe, emulate, question, and critique them. (147)
Shamoon and Burns argue that in a writing center, both generalist and specialist tutors who are knowledgeable about discipline-specific conventions can communicate those conventions to clients. Most important, the writing center provides a place of social interaction, a place where tutors are not merely telling clients what conventions to use, but a place where the use of those conventions is open to critique and discussion. In his article “The Function of Introductory Composition as a Cultural Discourse,” Alan France argues that teaching freshmen (i.e., inexperienced communicators in academia) academic discourse often encourages them to accept it, to become part of the institutional discourse that oppresses them. France calls for a means of teaching inexperienced writers that allows them to critique the academic discourse in power. Directive tutoring in the writing center provides such a means. Here, clients are not only absorbing knowledge of the conventions; they can talk about and critique them. Genre theorists argue that such social interaction and critique are part of the process of becoming experienced communicators within the academy (see e.g., Reid, Cope and Kalantzis), and this process also contributes to providing students a liberatory education.

Shamoon and Burns point out:

... social constructionists challenge the private, a-disciplinary nature of writing, but according to Robert J. Connors there is little in the practice of teaching or tutoring writing that has changed because of social constructionist views. Connors maintains that, in the classroom, social constructionists still base teaching and tutoring upon stages in the writing process. Thus, the social constructionist critique has broadened our understanding of the contexts of writing, but it has not formed an alternative set of practices. (137)

Genre theory, as a partner of social constructionist theory, allows a means for this “alternative set of practices” to become a reality.

Implications for Training Writing Center Tutors

Instead of focusing on the dichotomy between generalist/specialist tutors, writing center staff can focus on establishing a broader theoretical framework for tutor training that better prepares both generalists and specialists to help writers in all disciplines. Tutors with backgrounds in English, for example, can learn discipline-specific discourse practices of other fields in order to assist clients who visit the writing center, and they can learn to recall the processes of first learning academic discourse in their field so that they can help novice writers in English. In order to help tutors learn other fields’ discourse conventions and help highlight foundational writing conventions for specialists, writing center directors and administrators can become familiar with the culture that produced those conventions, communicate with experienced communicators within the field, analyze the writing produced in that field, and provide models for tutors to use, along with knowledge gained about that discipline’s culture. While space does not permit an extensive discussion of all these processes, I would like to discuss each briefly.

Becoming familiar with the culture that has constructed the social environment in which clients are writing provides crucial insight into writing within a discipline. One way to become familiar with a discipline’s culture is through talking. Faculty and students often talk with each other informally in the halls or in offices of the ECE Department which usually has open doors at all times, and this talk provides an exchange of “lore” that creates knowledge within this department as a community. This informal conversation provides an opportunity for discussing ideas important to the discipline of engineering and its relationship to writing that eventually have become part of the ECE Department’s philosophies; in addition, the conversations continually re-create the way we view the engineering culture.

Through talking, two issues in particular provided us with insight into the engineering culture and ECE’s new heightened focus on writing: the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technologies (ABET) criteria and the integration of engineering education with other disciplines. When the ECE Writing Center first was established, director Alford and humanities writing center director Jennie Ariail interviewed professors within ECE to determine their students’ writing needs. Sometimes, the professors could pinpoint a specific area, such as organization; at other times, the professors provided valuable information on the history of writing in their field.

During this process of learning about the culture of ECE, I cannot overemphasize the importance of communicating with experienced members of the field—the ECE faculty. Because writing conventions emerge from social situations, as Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Winsor discuss, learning about the conventions through social interaction can allow writing center staff an “inside look” at the ways writing is produced in a field. All kinds of communication—from casual discussions to formal interviews—can provide a Burkean “terministic screen” through which to view these clients’ positions within the academy. And, provided with this information, tutors can understand more about the social culture in which these clients are writing, an understanding that leads to more focused and informative tutoring sessions.

Ways to gain such information through conversation will vary among writing centers. Undergraduate tutors may not have access to
The Debate over Generalist and Specialist Tutors

Interviewing faculty or casually meeting with them in their offices. Writing center administrators can encourage tutor-faculty interaction, however, by organizing staff meetings designed to focus on discipline-specific writing. Here, tutors from English and other discipline-specific fields can become aware of faculty’s concerns about writing in the disciplines. Often, examples of writing from different disciplines can be used as springboards for discussion in these meetings. Even if joint staff meetings are not possible, writing center administrators can tape-record interviews with faculty or otherwise document the conversations so that all tutors can learn how to address faculty expectations in tutoring sessions and learn about discipline-specific genre characteristics.

Since genres are localized, tutors need to understand that different professors may have different expectations and requirements for different classes. For my dissertation in ECE, I developed a list of what I thought were “generic” characteristics of lab reports from an introductory lab course, based on interviews when the writing center first opened. Then, after developing my list, I interviewed several professors who had taught the course, asking for feedback regarding the characteristics.

What surprised me during the interviewing process was how different the professors’ responses were. For example, when asked if students should include definitions in the introductions to their lab reports, the professors voiced three different views. One professor said not to define trivial things, but he remarked that for the student, it would be difficult to know which definitions might be trivial and which ones would not be. Another professor stated that if the report contained a lot of equipment, then it should be defined, unless it had been used and defined previously in other lab reports. The third professor said that he prefers students not to define equipment and terms explicitly but instead to define the equipment through the techniques they use in the lab. Integrating the equipment with the lab processes through writing is educational, according to this instructor.

When asked about including specific “thesis” sentences or an overview statement, again, the professors provided three equally diverse views. One interviewee revealed that he would like to see a thesis about what students hoped they would learn in the lab, rather than a statement which contained information about the report’s structure. A second view, given by another instructor, was that a thesis statement was hard to read and usually didn’t grab a reader’s interest, but stating the report’s organization is good. Another professor indicated that a thesis would be “useful,” but including one depends on the length of the report. If the report is short, an explicit thesis may not be necessary because headings would reveal the report’s structure.

The results of these interviews complicated our tutors’ discussions about generic characteristics for lab reports. The various professors’ answers caused the tutors to humbly realize that there was no single “cookbook” way to teach engineering writing. The professors’ differing responses created an opportunity for tutors to increase student awareness about the adaptability necessary for meeting different professors’ writing expectations. Adjusting to various professors’ course genres within an academic context prepares students to adapt to future workplace writing demands, such as meeting the communication standards of various employers. In addition, the professors’ responses provided a richer, more global perspective about writing in this field, a perspective which ultimately allowed the tutors to provide students with more information about the genres in which they were writing.

After collecting responses from the professors, I analyzed a selected group of students’ lab reports and presented the results. Such a formal analysis provides a wealth of information that then can be articulated to writing center tutors, who can use the information during consulting sessions. For example, the interviews revealed that in lab report conclusions, professors wish their students to generalize results learned in the lab to some future application, either to a future lab exercise or to a future workplace situation. This application of inductive reasoning is often one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp, and my study indicated that students often could not discuss their results inductively at the beginning of the semester, although by the end of the semester, many could. Beginning students’ difficulties with inductive reasoning had to be pointed out to our engineering tutor, who, since she is a senior, had long ago mastered the process of displaying evidence of inductive reasoning in her conclusions. Reminding her that beginning students often have difficulty in this area enabled her to help them. Since our tutors are aware of the importance professors place on inductive reasoning, the tutors are able to ask questions about future application to prompt students to think inductively from the beginning of the semester. Discussing this principle particularly becomes useful if models of conclusions that include inductive thinking are used during consultations to show students effective examples of the level of induction to use.

Providing models for tutors to use as they consult with clients illustrates another way genre theory can be practically applied in the writing center. Many scholars have debated the pedagogical effectiveness of modeling (Callaghan, Knapp, and Noble; Cope and Kalantzis; Freedman; Hillocks; Sawyer and Watson; and Stolarek). I propose that using models at some point during a consultation greatly aids clients who are learning to write an unfamiliar discourse. In the ECE Writing Center, we use lab reports to help writers gain a visual picture of the way the reports are ordered. In addition, clients can see the ways terms are used and the level of detail appropriate for their reports. Clients do not take the models
with them, and we do not allow them to study the models too long or use them as a crutch during the consultation; instead, tutors can use the models as springboards for discussion about discourse conventions. Tutors using models in this way, along with using knowledge gained about that discipline’s culture, can create a much more productive consultation than if the tutor does not have any information about the writer’s field.

Conclusion

Genre theory provides a new lens through which we can view writing center practice, and it provides a means to explore how social constructionist theory can affect our day-to-day practices in writing centers. Through the application of genre theory, both generalists and specialists can be trained to learn about the culture of a discipline, communicate with faculty, analyze writing done in the disciplines, and pass valuable knowledge on to clients. In addition, tutors who consider themselves specialists can learn and remember what kinds of discourse strategies novice writers in their field need to learn. The application of genre theory can therefore only strengthen writing center theory and practice by empowering tutors and facilitating writers learning the discourses of their field. However, the real strength of genre theory is that it explicitly reveals to all involved in a writing collaboration that contexts exist to be real.

Notes

1 Specialists’ ability to ask the right questions during a consulting session becomes clear when we consider the following scenario: an engineering professor comes to the writing center with a journal article and asks for help from an engineering specialist tutor. The tutor, while a specialist, does not necessarily know the academic discourse conventions of the journal for which the professor is writing, and she may not know the subject matter. But, because she is familiar with the engineering culture and technical writing in the field, she will be able to ask valuable questions that can still help the professor, who is more of a specialist in engineering than the tutor is. Because no one can control who decides to visit the writing center, specialists therefore need to know not only the subject of their field but also what questions to ask writers at all levels, from novice writer to experienced professor.

2 One area of future research in writing center theory might be exploring the relationship among genre theory, social constructionist theory, feminist theory, and their relationship to writing center studies, since, like social constructionist theory, feminism has been foundational to writing center theory.

3 For an in-depth discussion of the differences between traditional and progressivist curriculums and their problems, see Cope and Kalantzis’ introduction to The Powers of Literacy (6, 17-18). One difficulty that these writers discuss is that traditional curriculum attempts to transmit fixed cultural and linguistic contents through curriculum but fails those who do not find a comfortable home in the culture of schooling; while progressivist curriculum, despite its pretense to openness, operates with a set of cultural and linguistic presuppositions that are loaded in less explicit ways to favour a certain sort of middle-class culture and discourse. (17-18)

In contrast, a curriculum rooted in genre theory acknowledges boundaries and does not try to erase them. See Cope, et al’s “Bibliographical Essay: Developing the Theory and Practice of Genre-based Literacy” in the same essay collection for more information on the Australian Genre School’s tenets and background.

4 In addition to the sources on genre discussed in this section, interested readers might want to consult work by the following scholars: Marilyn Chapman, Davida Charney and Richard Carlson, Joann Dennett, Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, J. Harper, Anne Herrington and Charles Moran, George Hillocks, Gunther Kress, Stewart Marshall, Greg Myers, Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami, and Elizabeth Stolarek.

5 A continuing focus of social constructionist has been how novices learn literacy within the academy. Works in composition studies such as Mike Rose’s When a Writer Can’t Write, David Bartholomae’s and Anthony Petrosky’s Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts, and Peter Elbow’s “Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues” all highlight the exclusive nature of the academy and the necessity to make room for students just learning academic discourse conventions. Central to these works is the argument about what constitutes literacy, a topic which Elspeth Stuckey, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson, and Michael Holzman, for example, have discussed.
The discussion here is influenced by the fact that in my experience working in an engineering writing center, I was a generalist. Therefore, some of the strategies I discuss apply particularly well to training generalist tutors; however, these strategies also are valuable for training specialist tutors, since learning more about the culture and conventions of their discipline, for example, can only strengthen tutoring sessions.

The entire study can be found in my dissertation, titled “Assessing Students’ Genre Knowledge in an Engineering Writing Center.”

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I would like to suggest that our professional marginalization results in part because we have only begun conversing with our institutions. . . . (Byron Stay 3)

The range of outreach projects recounted in recent journal articles, discussions on WCENTER’s electronic forum, and conference presentations indicate that collectively we as writing center professionals have indeed been working to extend the conversation about one-to-one work across our campuses. Writing across the curriculum partnerships with classroom teachers (Gill; Mullin, “Tutoring for Law Students”; Soliday), satellite writing centers in dorms or specific academic departments (“Advice on Satellite Centers”), on-line writing centers (Denny and Livesey), and administrative portfolios reflecting the complex combination of teaching, research, and administration entailed in the work of writing center directors (Olson; Perdue) are all examples of the expanding presence of writing centers at our institutions. Yet if we are to extend the benefits of one-to-one work to teachers, the individuals who most influence the type of writing our students do, we need to find ways of communicating with them directly and regularly. The conference summary—the record of a tutor’s interaction with a student, written up and sent to the instructor upon the student’s written request—offers one of the few ways we have to extend the discussion of one-to-one work beyond the center on a weekly basis. However, this form is not universally endorsed. Some writing center professionals—including those described as “sharers” by Michael Pemberton in a 1995 Writing Lab Newsletter “Ethics” column—perceive these reports as promoting “a unified educational experience for students” and “productive relationships with faculty” (13). Others—including those described by Pemberton as “seclusionists”—see summaries as just another instance of limiting tutors to the role of “service workers” for instructors (Pemberton 13).