I am happy to share with you the Spring 2017 Writing Center Session Notes, our biannual newsletter put together by our Writing Center tutors.

This edition of Session Notes differs a little from previous issues as we highlight a major focus of our semester: hosting the 2017 Rocky Mountain Writing Center Association Tutor Conference. The RMWCA TutorCon (as we affectionately call it) brings together undergraduate, graduate, and professional tutors and administrators from a region extending from New Mexico to Montana. This year, eight of our own MSU undergraduate peer tutors presented their research on topics like writing centers as brave/safe spaces, non-native writers and academic writing, and Foucault’s heterotopia in writing center spaces, as well as the panel co-led by our tutors and tutors from Belgrade High School (featured on p. 4). We also feature Michele Eodice, our keynote speaker and MSU Writing Center mentor. I highly recommend Michele’s recent work, The Meaningful Writing Project, a cross-institutional multi-year research project asking seniors what their most meaningful writing project was in their college career. The Meaningful Writing Project offers insight for all those teaching writing no matter the discipline.

Session Notes focuses on the conference, but we continue to see a vibrant community of writing as our one-on-one tutoring, writing groups, and course partnerships grow. As the semester comes to a close, please know that we are available to work with students throughout finals week, and we will be open (in the library) throughout the summer. Writing is happening here at MSU!

Michelle Miley
MSU Writing Center Director

Letter from the MSU Writing Center Director

FINALS WEEK HOURS
*Walk-ins only*
Sunday (MSU Library)
4 PM - 10 PM
Mon - Tues (Wilson 1-114)
9 AM - 5 PM
Wed - Thurs (Wilson 1-114)
9 AM - 3 PM

SUMMER HOURS
Mon-Thurs (MSU Library)
9:15 AM - 3:15 PM
Friday (MSU Library)
9:15 AM - 1:00 PM
Hosting and participating in the RMWCA Tutor Convention has been one of the most educational experiences I’ve had as an MSU Writing Center tutor. The conference began Friday night with a tutor social. Through conversations with other tutors, we were able to learn about the bigger picture of our work, which is to build relationships with writers and writing instead of simply editing.

On Saturday morning, tutors got down to the business of the conference. Many of MSU’s tutors were presenting at and attending their first conference. Tutors reached for deeper academic understanding of the importance of facilitating conversations around writing and learning to think more critically about our work.

The presentations pulled from different disciplines, drawing information from the social sciences, educational psychology, and social justice realms. A presentation focusing on the expectancy effect and a growth mindset discussed how students should be rewarded for their hard work instead of simply the ability to complete something quickly. This led to thoughts on potential Writing Center outreach and better ways of communicating within the university.

A presentation on ESL students and tutoring encouraged us to look outside of ourselves and our rituals within our education system to better understand the way different cultures value knowledge. We attempted to think about how learning a different language affects communication between individuals and how we can accommodate different identities and backgrounds across various disciplines.

By the end of the conference, we found ourselves full of information and understanding, with the challenge to “caddiwoomple” in tutoring instead of simply getting lost.

caddiwoomple (v.)
To travel purposefully toward an as-yet-unknown destination.

[ENGLISH SLANG]
WRITING SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Michele Eodice, Associate Provost and Director of the Writing Center at the University of Oklahoma, was not only the keynote speaker for our conference but has also been a key figure in the success of our own Writing Center. Eodice was at Kansas State University at the same time English Department Chair Kirk Branch was there. From working with Eodice, Kirk came to understand the potential for writing center environments as communities of learning. He brought his understanding to MSU and worked for the resources needed to create the dynamic, vibrant community that is our Writing Center today. Her legacy lives on through our work here.

The conference theme was “Get Lost (in Tutoring),” a theme inspired by Eodice’s co-authored book The Everyday Writing Center. Eodice and her coauthors draw from Rebecca Solnit’s idea that when we allow ourselves to “get lost,” “the world has become larger than our knowledge of it” (A Field Guide to Getting Lost, p. 22). In her keynote, Eodice complicated the notion of getting lost, noting that to be “lost” is not often a comfortable or good thing. Without a way to “be found,” getting lost can lead to destruction. Eodice challenged those of us in the Writing Center to find our own guides and to be guides for our student writers.

One way Eodice’s work has guided writing scholarship most recently has been in her research with writing center scholars Anne Ellen Geller from St. John’s University and Neal Lerner from Northeastern University. The project is an IRB-approved study involving surveys and interviews with students and faculty that explores what students define as the most meaningful writing assignments they have completed in their academic career. For a summary of their findings and information on creating writing environments that lead to more meaningful experiences for students, check out their website: www.meaningfulwritingproject.net.

WHY PEER TUTORS?

The foundation of our support is our peer tutor program. Our peer tutors are not only committed but also able to provide support to students because they are peers rather than professionals and because they go through rigorous training and education. Students are comfortable working with them, and because the tutors are not disciplinary experts, student writers gain authority and confidence as they articulate what they know about their discipline.

In addition, our peer tutors gain professional and academic experience. We are supporting them as they support our student writers.
From childhood, we follow the trails our teachers set before us, until one day we gain the confidence to break our own trails. This instance of “leaving the trail” that others have shaped often comes later than it could. For the RMWCA Tutor Conference, Bay Stephens and I investigated how high school writing centers can allow this paradigm shift to take place at an earlier stage in life.

We teamed up with Aysha Chidester, Thomas O’Leary, and Lauren Adams, three writing center tutors from Belgrade High School. One of the most rewarding experiences at the conference was witnessing the confidence and professionalism that these three brought to the table. My gratitude for their personal drive and charming presence also extends to their director, Aaron Yost. Aaron goes above and beyond the call of duty every day in his work, both as a teacher and as head of the high school writing center.

As I was not the sole presenter of this panel, the Belgrade tutors also wanted to share a short reflection of their experiences:

“The main thing I enjoyed about the conference was not the presentations, but the conversations I had. I thought that these were really the instances where people cultivated a ‘brain child’ comprised of their own experience and all the info they’ve taken in from everything else they participated in that day.” - Thomas O’Leary

“I just wanted to say thank you for putting on the writing conference at MSU, and for letting the BHS Writing Center participate in this amazing event! It was a BLAST! It was awesome working with Adrienne and Bay in putting on the paradigm presentation, and I learned a lot from this experience.” - Aysha Chidester

BELGRADE HIGH PARTNERSHIP
Adrienne Geraci - Peer Tutor

ESL AND GRADUATE SPECIALIST
ERIN STRICKLAND

Erin Strickland is the Writing Center’s specialist for graduate-level writing, as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) students. She found her way into education after working as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Georgia, where she taught middle and high school students. She has a master’s degree from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California and has been teaching graduate and undergraduate non-native speakers of English for seven years.

During the 2017 summer sessions, the MSU Writing Center will offer cross-disciplinary graduate writing groups.

A Writing Center facilitator will participate to help guide the discussion, but the sessions ultimately revolve around the dialogue and needs of the writers.

Writing groups will meet once every two weeks during the 2017 summer session.

Email writingcenter@montana.edu for more information.