The Oregon State University Writing Center:
History and Context

Chapter One: Entering the Scholarly Conversation About Writing Centers

Like all history, writing center history is maddeningly but joyously complicated,
and all models are susceptible to the complex temporal and cultural situatedness,
and thus political identities, of the individuals and communities who construct them.

—Peter Carino "Open Admissions and the
Construction of Writing Center History:
A Tale of Three Models" 43

When I was an undergraduate at Skidmore College, a small liberal arts college in New York state, in the mid-1980s, I had never heard of writing centers. There wasn't one at my school, and when I needed help with writing (which was fairly often), I visited my professors during their office hours. Now Skidmore has a well-publicized writing center, staffed by around twenty tutors*[1], and offers extensive hours.

Skidmore is hardly alone in having established a writing center in the past few decades. It is now quite common to find some sort of writing assistance available at many schools, including private colleges, state universities, and community colleges. I first heard about writing centers from a Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC*) instructor from whom I took a technical writing course in winter, 2000. He knew that the Writing Desk in LBCC's Learning Center was short-staffed, and he recommended me to the person who ran it. And so I began working individually with students on their writing, learning as I went. This type of work, I learned, drew on many of the same skills I had used as a social worker.

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[1] An asterisk indicates the term is found in the Glossary.

I read all of the books about working in writing centers housed at the LBCC Writing Desk to help me understand what to do and why. Then I enrolled in a class at Oregon State University (OSU), Writing 411: the Teaching of Writing, to further my understanding. My enjoyment of this course and of the field of rhetoric and writing led me to enroll in the graduate program at OSU (while continuing my work at LBCC's Writing Desk). In 2002 and 2003, I worked in OSU's Writing Center* (part of the larger Center for Writing and Learning [CWL*]). It was fascinating to experience the differences—and the similarities—between the programs at LBCC and OSU.

Little did I know then that I would write my masters thesis on the history of OSU's Writing Center. I had not thought of the Writing Center as having a past, much less one as rich as it does. Yet I've discovered how and why it was formed, the changes in personnel and in practice that have occurred, and the various struggles it has encountered.

Briefly, the OSU Writing Center was started in 1976 and is housed on the lowest level of Waldo Hall, one of the oldest buildings on campus. The staff includes a director*, a half-time assistant director, a coordinator*, and an average of thirty-five student tutors called writing assistants*, all of whom work with students* of all years and in all fields year round (the first three are actually the staff of the CWL). Currently, the Writing Center is relatively strong in regard to financial and university support, but its history is wrought with examples of when both were lacking. Statistics show that the Writing Center staff has helped many students, and logic suggests that it should remain open and be well-funded, but its existence has always been in jeopardy and likely always will be. Why is this the situation? Similar situations exist for most writing centers, and this is only one of the numerous themes that show up in writing center histories. The history

of the OSU Writing Center, while unique, exemplifies many of the themes and tensions found in all writing centers.

By providing as complete and accurate a history of the OSU Writing Center as possible, this thesis will substantiate the various themes, elucidated later in this chapter, that exist in the literature about writing centers. In fact, one might say that only through histories can we see these themes and, similarly, most histories of writing centers bear traces of these themes. A vital facet of these themes is that various tensions—conflicting demands, ideas, or purposes—exist. These tensions occur within writing centers themselves; for example, a common tension is between the dual purposes of helping under-prepared students with basic skills and of helping all students become better writers. And tensions also exist between writing centers and their larger institutions, further complicating the situation. Moreover, the truism that we—those who work in, study, and/or are closely associated with writing centers—can only know where we are (that is, our impact and our status as individual writing centers and as a profession) if we know from where we've come is true. And in knowing both where we are and how we got there, we can gain the perspective to decide where we want to go. The questions of where the OSU Writing Center has come from, where it is now, and where it hopes to go will be touched on in this thesis, along with how the OSU Writing Center fits in the larger writing center history and community. Therefore, understanding the scholarly conversation about writing centers is important.

Types of Writing Center Histories

As a scholarly and pedagogical project, writing centers are a subfield within a larger discipline of rhetoric and writing, and thus the scholarly conversation occurs both within the writing center community and in the larger general composition field. In fact, the writing center

community—and its journals and conferences—grew out of general composition's journals and conferences. The research about writing centers is quite varied, and there are several different types.

The different types of historical research about writing centers are histories of individual centers, which are often anecdotal; histories of the writing center movement; meta-histories, which are historiographic studies; and explorations of the different pedagogies and philosophies of writing centers over time. These histories can overlap; for instance, the history of an individual center may include its pedagogy and philosophy. The following list of history types is not exhaustive, nor is the list of scholars mentioned as examples for each type below, although each scholar mentioned has made significant contributions to the scholarly conversation. And the following examples give background information which will be helpful in putting writing centers into context in Chapter Two.

Histories of individual writing centers explain how a particular writing center started and often include how it evolved. They may include the reasons why that center began (the need, that is), the pedagogy, the philosophy, and/or a typical day. For example, Neal Lerner has worked on the histories of specific writing centers, often relying on archival material for information. Most recently, he published "'Laboring Together for the Common Good': The Writing Laboratory at the University of Minnesota General College, circa 1932"—a history of a writing center that began in the 1930s at a community college. Lerner goes into some depth about the purpose and accomplishments of this writing center, referring to documents written by Francis S. Appel, the first director of the Laboratory, and by Malcolm S. MacLean, the first dean of the college. He shares a brief history of the center (which is still in operation), placing it in the context of the 1930s United States, but focuses mostly on that first year of operation.

In 1993, Joyce A. Kinkead and Jeanette G. Harris published *Writing Centers in Context*, descriptions of twelve very different writing centers (each written by that center's director), which cover the structure of each center, staffing, students served, typical sessions, and histories of each center. (The start of each center is distinguished as its history.) That each center's history is included in the thumbnail view of the center allows full, if condensed, overviews of multiple writing centers. Interestingly, this book can not be considered a single type of historical document; although most of the chapters cover the individual writing centers, as a whole, the book illustrates the second type of writing center history because the editors explore how these schools exemplify the writing center movement.

Histories of the writing center movement examine all or a portion of the years that writing centers have been known to exist. Some seek to tell the chronology of the events, while others focus on using the history in the service of a point; that is, while some movement histories have little or no interpretation or speculation about the events described, others argue as to what the history demonstrates. Elizabeth Boquet, in her essay "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions" traces the history of writing center research and publications. She stresses the inherent contradictions in the ways that writing centers identify or present themselves. Different outcomes are at stake, she points out, from the conclusions drawn from these questions: are writing labs methods or sites? (466). Are they for remedial students only or for all students? Should they be auto-tutorial (students work alone) or one-to-one (students work individually with tutors) (473)? Boquet also discusses the impact of psychological, especially Rogerian, principles on writing center work in the 1940s—and how these enhanced the feelings of secrecy and of safety within labs (470). The dichotomy between how writing centers *present*

themselves and what *actually* happens in them (that is, as labs or sites, for under-prepared students or for all, for individual or collaborative work) guides Boquet's telling of writing center history.

Neal Lerner also relates a more general writing center history in "Punishment and Possibility: Representing Writing Centers, 1939-1970." In this essay, he traces the history of studying writing centers and the ways that history was represented before open admissions*. His most salient points are that there is a lack of historical information about writing centers and that few books on composition studies cover writing centers (53-4). He further explores the struggle between writing centers as venues for remediation ("punishment") and venues for collaboration ("possibility") over time. Either way, he says, it is the conditions in which those in writing centers worked—always at risk for being closed, with few resources—that led to the lack of publications and of acceptance from 1939 to 1970 (54). Indeed, Lerner says,

> For writing centers today the contrast between the center
> as punishment and the center as possibility defines
> day-to-day existence. [. . . T]his contrast also defines
> writing center history, and can provide contemporary
> writing center directors with a map of hazards to be
> avoided if they are to achieve the professional status for
> which they yearn. (55)

It seems, then, that histories can be more than just a chronology; Boquet and Lerner parallel writing center movement chronology with interpretations of the events and the lessons that can be learned.

A third type of scholarship about writing centers is historiography or meta-history, which examines the ways in which the story or stories of writing centers are presented. The best example of this is perhaps Peter Carino's "Open Admissions and the Construction of Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models" (used as the epigraph for this chapter). Carino examines three approaches or models to writing about writing center history. The first model is

the evolutionary model, which describes writing centers as progressing (because of open

admissions) from remedial to collaborative work. The second model, the dialectic model, Carino

says, emphasizes the struggles faced by the heroic writing center directors and staff. Sometimes,

he writes, historians have used both, but even that approach is inadequate. To remedy the failings

of the evolutionary and dialectic models, Carino argues for the third approach, which he calls the

cultural model. It is more inclusive, incorporating both the evolutionary information of and the

critical events in writing centers' histories, and considering them in the context of the times, the

institution, and the relevant peoples' roles. His model, he says, reflects,

> a desire and a need to construct an elaborately detailed
> and historiographically sophisticated model that would
> more effectively account for the complexity of writing
> center development than has previous writing center work
> [. . . by being] aware of its own role in historicizing, [of]
> the dilemma of representing history in language, and [of]
> the need for thick descriptions of the multiple forces
> impacting writing centers. (30)

Carino's model also examines the messiness of progress and acknowledges the significant

contributions of certain people without "reifying their work as doctrine" (31).

Carino analyzes the start of the the Writing Lab at Purdue University and the role that

Muriel Harris, undoubtably one of the field's most important contributors, played in it by looking

at how the evolutionary and dialectic models would describe the Writing Lab in 1976.

Evolutionarily, the Lab was an add-on to supply remedial services but one careful to not usurp

the role of the classroom, and dialectically, it lauded Harris' persistence and vision. Both of these

models fail, however, to examine Harris' position at Purdue in those early years. As Carino

summarizes it,

> Through the lens of the cultural model, the initial lab at
> Purdue is impacted by such diverse factors as a national
> debate on student writing ability, Harris' marital and
> professional status, a depressed job market for Renaissance
> scholars, the initial wishes of the Purdue English Department,
> and the individual talent and dedication enabling Harris to
> cultivate and determine the pedagogy and mission of the lab in a
> way that would satisfy her, meet the needs of students, and fulfill the
> expectations of those footing the bill. (41)

It is only by considering all of these influences or situations together that we can understand the early evolution of the Writing Lab at Purdue. Still, this understanding is incomplete, as this model, like all others, has limitations and is a more useful model for examining individual centers than for generalizing. (This thesis attempts to embody the cultural model, as I will explain later in this chapter.)

Other contributions to the scholarly conversation focus less on the history of writing centers and more on writing center work in general—particularly the concept of writing centers and their practices and philosophies. Stephen North's 1984 essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," rails against the ignorance of the composition and university communities at large, which viewed writing centers as remedial. He specifies ways in which writing centers address non-remedial writing issues. (North wrote a follow-up to this article in 1994, called "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center,'" in which he acknowledges that he may have idealized some aspects of writing centers—in particular the relationships between students and tutor, tutors and teachers, and tutors and institutions—and amends his statements for more accuracy.)

Andrea Lunsford discusses the concepts of power and collaboration in her article "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." In it, she challenges those working in writing centers to do more than just pay lip-service to the idea of collaboration by suggesting that the issues of control are often still at play on a subtle and unacknowledged level. Indeed, because

many students who visit writing centers view the tutors as experts, tutors are already placed in positions of power. *Saying* that one works collaboratively does not, she says, necessarily make it so.

A third and related examination of the work done in writing centers is that of Nancy Welch, in *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*. Welch looks at the dissonance between the models and theories of writing centers, which are "designed to promote revision as opportunity, seek[ing] to offer a genuinely 'collaborative' and 'liberatory' experience of writing and learning." Instead, revision "is felt and resisted [by students] as *death-work*" (emphasis original; 35-36). Indeed, she suggests, by expanding on Lunsford's ideas, that writing centers, despite their claim to be rid of hierarchies and divisions, may "mask the underlying aggression that psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan [. . .] places at the heart of teaching and learning" (36). Welch explores the potential violence and loss in these encounters for both students and tutors, saying,

> the writing center is not always a safe place for us [staff and students] to try out new ways of writing and being. *It's not a place where we're freed from institutions and their influences and taboos,* nor is it a place where we can entertain alien viewpoints without threat to our sense of self and other institutional identities. (emphasis added; 50)

Certainly, we try to make writing centers safe—often by making the atmosphere friendly—for students and for tutors, but, as Welch points out, there is an inherent violence in revising writing, and we are always tied into the larger institution, as Carino and others also believe.

The writers discussed in the above section of this chapter have contributed excellent examples of the types of writing center histories, illustrating the breadth of these writings. Additional scholarship on writing centers and writing center history exists, of course, including

studies and writings by Muriel Harris, Nancy Maloney Grimm, and Jeanne Simpson, among others.

Themes Presented in Writing Centers and Writing Center Histories

What, then, does this conversation tell us about the history of writing centers? Several themes—many of them issues with which writing center staff struggle—emerge from the various types of research, some of which are found in the articles by Lerner, Boquet, and North, touched on earlier in this chapter. These themes include the task of remediation versus that of collaboration, the reputation of writing centers, the role of open admissions in writing center development, the vulnerability of writing centers, the variety of students worked with and how they are worked with, and the question of whether writing centers do what they say they do. As with the types of research, the themes sometimes overlap, and the same historical article or book often illustrates more than one theme. All of these themes appear when one looks at the OSU Writing Center over time, as readers will see in Chapters Three and Four, and I will elucidate how each of these themes is manifested at the OSU Writing Center in the final chapter.

One major theme is the role of writing centers as sites for remediation versus sites for collaboration, both in fact and in reputation. Many writing centers have or had a remedial component. The "remedial" portion often includes self-study or working by rote, perhaps with tapes (or, now, online) to teach students of basic grammar and punctuation. Many of these offerings were developed to assist students who were less ready for college writing because they had either forgotten or never learned these skills. In 1945, the University of Iowa's writing center introduced a remedial function into its existing writing center in response to the University's concern about students not passing a communication skills exam (Kelly 12). (According to

Lerner, strong emphasis on communication skills occurred in the 1930s and 1940s.) And many writing centers provide handouts or online information about punctuation and grammar; students can even download study materials, exercises, and quizzes from numerous writing centers' websites, including the Writing Lab at Purdue University.

Although tutors do help students with grammar and punctuation, writing center staff tends to dislike being associated with remedial skills. First, it discourages students from visiting the writing center, as they feel stigmatized, stupid, or even punished. As Lerner states in "Punishment and Possibilities," the University of North Carolina labeled students who did not do well in writing "delinquent," and a note to this effect was placed in their record until they had successfully completed the required work at their university's writing center (56). Furthermore, the remedial reputation is not an inviting one for skilled writers who want to improve an already good paper by getting some feedback and/or another point of view on it. How, for instance, can students escape feeling stigmatized when professors express surprise that students with few errors on their papers choose to visit a writing center, as North describes ("The Idea" 72-3)? This attitude of surprise and misunderstanding is almost definitely conveyed to students, some of whom may rethink their inclination to visit the writing center. And it has further reaching implications throughout the school in regard to budget and reputation, to which I'll return later in this section.

Most writing centers, even if they offer some remedial or basic skills components, focus more on the collaborative work they provide. Lou Kelly, in her history of the University of Iowa Writing Center, mentioned earlier, explains that the Center was a collaborative institution when it began and that it returned to collaborative work when the staff realized that the rote drills were not helpful and made students resentful.

Many of those who write about writing centers express frustration but not surprise at centers being misunderstood. As Stephen North puts it,

> [m]isunderstanding is something one expects [. . .] in the writing center business [. . . but w]hat makes the situation particularly frustrating is that so many such people [from English Departments] will vehemently claim that they do, *really*, understand the idea of the writing center. ("The Idea" 71)

North, in both "The Idea of a Writing Center" and "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center,'" tries to clarify what writing centers actually do and why. But the reputation of writing centers remains associated with their being remedial or "fix-it" places. In fact, some college and university professors, as North states in "The Idea of a Writing Center," seem to believe that tutors will fix errors or will edit papers that are brought to them—and tell this to their students (71). Students are often, then, surprised to discover that they can't just drop off their papers to be fixed and are expected to actively participate in the session!

In addition to clarifying the purpose of writing centers, much of the scholarly conversation, especially that which explores writing center practices, concerns the theme of techniques for tutors to use when working with students on their papers and on helping students become better writers overall. Simply put, what should tutors do and what should they not do? How should they approach conferences*? Should they not write on students' papers, encouraging the students to write instead? Should they even hold a pen or pencil, for instance? Jeff Brooks, in "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," strongly recommends the hands-off approach, while Ilene Lurkis Clark, in "Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy," encourages tutors to evaluate each student's needs individually; Nancy Grimm, mentioned below, goes a step further in recommending that tutors learn as much as possible about each student.

Much of the debate about hands-on or hands-off is explored in the next chapter. Related to this debate is the theme of whether writing centers and their staff are really doing what they say they are, as Lunsford suggests. Do those tutors who follow the suggestion to not write on students' papers really *never* write on them? Do tutors *never* suggest wording when students seem to be struggling a lot (and/or provide "catch phrases" which help students out of corners)? Are tutors *always* able to focus on making each student a better writer—a goal advocated by many who work in writing centers—and not on making each paper better? And, when any of this is not done, do tutors "confess" to other tutors or to their supervisors that they've overstepped the recommended boundaries? Is this part of the secrecy to which Boquet refers?

In fact, much of the scholarly conversation expands on techniques and investigates different ways of working with students. Nancy Maloney Grimm, in her 1999 book *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*, examines the tendency to teach students who visit writing centers to write in academic ways—as if that is the only correct way to write (and this is similar to what Nancy Welch suggests). But, she says, this ignores the cultural and social history of each student. When working with students, writing center tutors should, instead, explain the conventions of academic writing but also discover the students' own ways of expressing their ideas. So she suggests that tutors get to know the students on a number of levels. Just as Grimm moves somewhat outside traditional composition and writing center theory in her recommendation, so too do other people in the writing center world. For instance, a panel called "Retheorizing Writing Center Practice: What Other Disciplines Can Teach Us About Conferencing" at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC*) in 2006 discussed ways of using skills from psychology, social work, and social justice in writing center work.

An additional writing center theme that enlarges the discussion is that of open admissions in the 1970s and its impact on writing centers and writing center work. According to Peter Carino, in "Open Admissions and the Construction of Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models," the perception by people in the composition community is that open admissions *led* to the creation of writing centers; Carino states that open admissions only *helped* in the growth of writing centers (33). Writing centers existed before the 1970s; Neal Lerner has found references to a writing center at Amherst College as long ago as 1895 ("Punishment and Possibility" 55), and, as previously mentioned, he wrote a history of a writing center that began in the 1930s. In fact, writing centers and an emphasis on communication skills were quite common in the 1930s and 1940s related to the growing numbers of children of immigrants and then veterans attending college (Lerner "Punishment and Possibility"). Furthermore, open admissions may not have been the only reason that writing centers and remedial services became more numerous; it's possible that the fear sprouting from the publication of the *Newsweek* article "Why Johnny Can't Write," by Merrill Sheils, in December, 1975 was a corollary or even stronger influence on the increase of writing centers in the latter half of the 1970s. Individual writing centers, then, were created before, during, and after open admissions, even though the misperception that they grew out of open admissions in the 1970s remains a theme in the writing center scholarly conversation.

The related issues of budget difficulties and of being viewed as expendable are another recurring theme many writing centers face. It's frequently agreed, with some humor, that writing centers are often in the basement of buildings or in other small, unfavorable spaces (Kinkead). And it's also agreed, with somewhat less humor, that writing center staff struggles to keep the space they have (Simpson, Braye, and Boquet). Lerner explores this and explains that because writing centers do not offer for-credit courses (in general) and rarely bring in money to the school

(as do the credit-bearing courses in various departments), they are seen as expendable or are one of the first services cut when the school experiences budget changes or problems. Lerner adds that the frequency of writing centers being staffed by lower-level instructors (and by students) also lends to the centers' expendability ("Punishment and Possibility" 66). These are, of course, only some of the themes found in writing center scholarship.

The Venues of the Scholarly Conversation

Another interesting avenue to explore, apart from the themes in the scholarly conversation, is where those conversations have taken place. Journals and conferences dedicated to writing center work have increased in number and stability over the years. And they owe their start, just as the initial scholarly conversation does, to general composition journals and conferences. The start of *the Writing Lab Newsletter* (*WLN*)exemplifies this. Michael A. Pemberton details this history in his article "The Writing Lab Newsletter as History: Tracing the Growth of a Scholarly Community." The idea began at a panel about writing center theory and administration at the 1977 CCCC. Many people attended the panel and shared ideas, and they wanted to continue the discussion. So, says Pemberton, Muriel Harris created the *WLN* as "a manifesto through which writing center personnel could find a voice" and sent it to the forty-nine people who had signed up as interested parties (22). The *WLN* not only helped these people communicate about writing center-related issues, it also kept them apprised of important events in individuals' lives (babies, deaths, etc.). Over time, the tracking of personal events has been eliminated, as it would be impossible with the now over one thousand subscribers (23-24). But while the *WLN* has become more professional and profession-focused, it remains an accessible

document, in part by publishing one or two articles by tutors in every issue, in a dedicated "Tutor's Column."

Other publications soon followed the *WLN*, including *the Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*) in 1980, and numerous books (Pemberton and Kinkead 4-5). Further, writing center research has been included as a topic of presentation at the CCCC since 1979. The National Writing Centers Association (now the International Writing Centers Association*) began in 1983, growing out of special sessions at CCCC (like the session described previously which inspired Harris to start the *WLN*) (Pemberton and Kinkead 4). The Association began hosting biannual and regional conferences. In addition, WCenter is an online discussion group in which members of the writing center community discuss issues and ideas, ask questions, and provide information (including some of the personal updates that are no longer in the *WLN*). It is a very active listserv, with an average of ten messages and responses a day (and many more people reading messages than posting them).

Another example of the establishment of writing center research is the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP*) at the University of Louisville, which collects histories and data from every writing center it can and provides guidance on how historical information can be gathered by interested individuals. A project that began in 2001, it "conducts and supports research on writing center theory and practice and maintains a research repository of historical, empirical, and scholarly materials related to Writing Center Studies" ("Writing Center Research Project"). The collected statistics are available on the website. They also do oral interviews (the transcript of one with Lisa Ede was used for this thesis) and collect writing center materials and documents (such as this thesis). Thus the growth of research and forums dedicated to writing centers is plain.

What Histories Can Teach Us

It has been demonstrated that there has been a proliferation of information—historic and otherwise—about writing centers, as well as increasing numbers of venues for sharing that information. But why should this information be collected? Why, for instance, does the WCRP collect the history, information, and material on every writing center that it can? What can we learn from the historical research of writing centers? First, rather than relying on stereotypes or untested assumptions, histories provide accurate information about specific writing centers' function and development.

Histories may also tell us about pedagogies and tools that might be adapted for other centers. Because writing centers are influenced by their institutions, what doesn't work in one school may well work in another. Looking back can provide information about circumstances. Also, it's advantageous for those working in a particular writing center to know the circumstances of that center's start and development. As Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead say in the introduction to *The Center Will Hold*, "One would like to say that it will be helpful for those who follow the pioneers to understand how we got here from there so they can enjoy the 'wisdom of the past.' Would that it had all been wisdom" (1). So we can learn from mistakes, as well. Further, writing center histories can be useful in tracing the careers of various writing center coordinators and directors who have risen in the fields of writing center work and of rhetoric and composition.

Furthermore, all of these types of histories and historical articles serve to teach readers more about writing centers, yes, but they also perform another important function: they explode myths about writing centers. When we look at the actual histories, we see, for instance, that remediation was not the sole nor even any purpose in even the earliest writing centers. Lou Kelly,

in "One-on-One, Iowa City Style: Fifty Years of Individualized Instruction in Writing," describes how Carrie Stanley established the Writing Center at the University of Iowa in the 1930s as a place for students to get one-on-one help with papers. It wasn't until 1945 that the University forced the Writing Center to change its function to remediation for students who had not passed a communications placement test (12). And we also see by reading balanced histories, what Carino calls cultural histories, that writing centers did not start with the open admissions movement in the 1970s, nor were they necessarily formed and maintained by fearless writing warriors who overcame impossible obstacles to bring aid in writing to the masses! We could even look more closely at the title of North's article "The Idea of a Writing Center"; how does the idea or, perhaps, *ideal*, match the reality of writing centers? Just as North revisited his ideas, we can revisit the myriad ideas, theories, and myths about writing centers. And not only *can* we, we *should*.

What *This* History Can Teach Us

This thesis serves as a history and exploration of the Writing Center at Oregon State University. As such, it describes the Writing Center's beginning, its role within the larger Center for Writing and Learning, the duties and individual contributions of its several directors and coordinators, and the training and duties of the writing assistants who work with students. As a history, it is inherently important (Ede personal interview). As a history of the OSU Writing Center, it provides insight into the struggles of maintaining a quality writing center for over thirty years, highlights in which ways the OSU Writing Center is similar to others and in which ways it differs, and illustrates the common themes described earlier.

While increasing numbers of histories of writing centers are available and even sought (by, for instance, the Writing Centers Research Project), the history recounted in this thesis has a number of strengths. First, as a book-length study, it is more detailed than most histories. Most other histories either give a general overview, or they examine one or two years or one or two characteristics in great detail. This history covers the whole of the thirty years of the OSU Writing Center's existence and examines all of the categories of possible study in detail (at least, as much as is possible). In this, it contributes to the scholarly conversation a complete and long-term picture from which interested people can access one or two specific facets or the whole history.

Further, this thesis is informed heavily by Carino's cultural model. That is, I consider the institution in which the OSU Writing Center exists; the way it is staffed and directed; its goals, philosophy, and pedagogy; and its particular struggles. To do this, I have included information about the CWL, the University, and the state of Oregon that had an impact on the Writing Center. Considering as much of the circumstances affecting the Writing Center as I've been able to gather has guided my recounting of its history.

My wish to include all context is both impossible and would make this thesis unwieldy. Further, because all histories or analyses are biased to varying extents, this thesis is no exception. I've worked in the Writing Center, so I'm not an uninvolved observer in this history; I am a participant-observer with a vested interest. As objective as I have tried to be in gathering information, conducting interviews, and in writing, my own information filter—my subjective viewpoint, that is—inevitably comes into play. Furthermore, the filters of my interviewees were operating, too. The fact that I knew both the CWL's director, Dr. Lisa Ede, who directed this thesis, and the assistant director, Wayne Robertson, for several years before I began this project

may have had an impact on what was said, the way it was said, and what I heard. Because much of the information in this thesis was obtained from oral histories, too, it can not be verified objectively. Furthermore, as we have seen in North's articles on "The Idea of a Writing Center," objectivity can be a difficult hurdle; it's tempting to idealize the Center and to place all the blame for all difficulties on external sources.

As indicated above, much of the information for this thesis comes from interviews with Ede and with Robertson, but I've also collected information from many additional sources. Some of the information is from interviews with the current Writing Center coordinator, with previous coordinators, the originator and first director of the Communication Skills Center (CSC*) (later renamed the Center for Writing and Learning), and other relevant people. In some cases, I was unable to find or to connect with people who had worked at the CSC/CWL. I've been lucky enough to find some archival materials, newspaper articles, and maps. A significant portion of my information was gathered from twenty-five years of annual reports written by Lisa Ede (or an interim director when she was on sabbatical). The annual reports provide information about changes, challenges, and/or accomplishments in the various programs of the CWL over the previous year, along with numbers of writing assistants and statistics about the students who use the programs. Readers can assume that any information not otherwise cited came from these annual reports.

This information is incomplete for a number of reasons. First, little information remains about the earliest years of the Communication Skills Center. Second, peoples' memories are not always accurate or complete—especially when looking back thirty years. It would have been impossible, for instance, for Lisa to tell me all of the ups and downs of the Center for Writing and Learning for each of her twenty-six years there. Also, the annual reports do not always

provide the same information every year; for instance, little budget information was included after 1994. Data that was not relevant at the time was omitted and is unobtainable now. And though the statistics are as accurate as possible, the original numbers were tracked by hand, and some inaccuracies undoubtedly exist. Finally, similar to the interviews, the annual reports are inherently biased in favor of the CWL and the Writing Center. As Ede explained in interviews, annual reports played a key role in her effort to advocate for the CWL.

Whenever possible, I've noted when and where information is incomplete. And, while I've included considerable information about the history of OSU's Writing Center, I have omitted some details to avoid overwhelming readers. Some specific information, such as the breakdown of numbers of writing assistants and of students who used the center, is available in the appendices. Nonetheless, the body of this thesis does contain detail and information about aspects as minute as furniture, for example. I have done this to provide readers with as much information as is manageable, since readers have different interests. Further, the cultural model of examining a history calls for detail; that is, in order to provide a complete picture—to convey the culture—as much information as possible must be provided.

I have also developed a glossary to increase ease of reading. When there is an asterisk (*) the first time a word appears, it indicates that the word (or acronym) is available in the Glossary. In most cases, the terms are explained in the text, but readers are encouraged to refer to the Glossary as needed. Also, when dates span two years, for example 1992-93, readers should understand that this refers to the academic year (September to June), unless otherwise noted.

The contents of the following chapters are summarized below. Chapter Two, "An Overview of Writing Centers," provides basic information about writing centers, including their staffing and administration, budget, and more. While it can not possibly cover every variation of

writing centers, it provides the background information necessary to understand the specific history of the OSU Writing Center. In some cases, it follows up on information presented or mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter Three, "The History of the Oregon State University Writing Center as Part of the Center for Writing and Learning," explores the early history of the Writing Center and its larger body, the Center for Writing and Learning. Because it is difficult to separate the reporting lines and the budget of the Writing Center from that of the CWL, the history of the CWL is examined, as well.

Chapter Four, "The Oregon State University Writing Center—Its Own Entity," looks at the philosophy and pedagogy of the Writing Center itself. It further explores both the duties of the coordinator and their identities and individual contributions. Chapter Four also provides a description of a typical experience in the Writing Center and a breakdown of the make-up of the Writing Center's writing assistants and of the students who use it. Further, it examines those elements of the Writing Center and its pedagogy which have remained constant over the years and those which have changed.

The final chapter, "Revisiting the Oregon State University Writing Center in Context," explores the OSU Writing Center in the context of other writing centers and the research done on them. In doing that, it follows up on the themes delineated in this chapter, analyzing how each has played out (and continues to play out) at the OSU Writing Center.

The combination of secondary research (in Chapters One and Two), primary research (in Chapters Three and Four), and analysis (in Chapter Five) delineates and illustrates those themes and tensions (remediation versus collaboration, reputation, open admissions, vulnerability, variety of students and styles of working, and whether writing centers do what they say they do)

discussed in this chapter. As stated previously, these themes and tensions are widespread in the writing center world and are not specific to the OSU Writing Center. Thus, this thesis allows readers to capture a more complete sense of writing centers—of all writing centers and of OSU's Writing Center—by providing information which explicates these themes and tensions. Tension, or struggles, are ubiquitous; without them, there is no need to grow, to examine, to change. Change is, in many ways, a constant in writing centers, as Chapter Two demonstrates.