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# CREATIVE WRITING IN THE WRITING CENTER

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## Creative Writing in the Writing Center

One type of writing not talked about and rarely seen in the writing center is creative writing. Through personal experience and research I have found that there are three problems concerning creative writing in the writing center. One of them is a fear tutors have of not knowing how to handle a tutoring session with a creative writing student. There is a lack of focus on how to tutor creative writing when training tutors. Another issue is the question of whether creative writers are visiting the writing center and if not, why? Lastly, there is the issue of whether or not creative writing faculty encourage their students to use the writing center, and if not why they do not explicitly mention the writing center as a valid resource in their classes compared to a professor teaching a literature or psychology class.

There is a place for creative writing in the writing center. Writing centers have an opportunity to create a space for creative writers that will help them during their revision process of fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and playwriting. Like Trinity College, the University of Tampa has dedicated its writing center to helping students with all types of writing. Lisa C. Brinbaum and Cathleen Kaufmann (from the University of Tampa), in their article “Becoming a Creative Writing Center,” address the fact that if they do offer a writing center that helps all types of writing, why do creative writers seem to have been forgotten? They say, “While students in composition, business, or science classes are encouraged to use our resources, the students in fiction or poetry classes [are] ignored” (Brinbaum and Kaufmann 6). They recognized that they worked to discourage the idea that a writing center is just for the English department. They were worried that students were going to view the writing center as a place only for the writing and English departments, so they focused more on encouraging students from other majors to use the writing center. During that process creative writers were neglected.

The writing center at Trinity College has a similar problem. In order to try and solve the problem tutors need to be trained and feel comfortable working with creative writers, students need to know that there is a place for them in the writing center, and faculty need to work with the writing center to provide that information to their students.

Tutors are trained readers who have the ability to offer insight on pieces written by student creative writers. However, literature on this subject addresses the issue of insecurities that tutors have when presented with an appointment with a creative writing student. In The Writing Lab Newsletter an article titled “Creative Writing in the Writing Center” by Kenneth Pobo states that many non-creative writers who are readers of creative work have difficulty discussing that type of writing with the writer because they are not familiar with it (Pobo 5). These insecurities are understandable because similar insecurities have developed in Trinity College writing associates. For example, when they have sessions with students who are working on a lab report and the tutor has not experienced writing a lab report at Trinity it can be difficult to have confidence in the possibility that they could help. In this case tutors are offered resources and talk about these specific insecurities while being trained. This is more common for specific types of writing, like lab reports, because science students are more likely to use the writing center than creative writers.

After speaking to writing associates at Trinity, I have found a mixed level of comfort about tutoring a creative writer. Two of the writing associates I talked to are creative writing students. They know the vocabulary of a creative writing class, and have had experience writing and reading fiction and poetry. One of them was very comfortable with the possibility of tutoring a student with a creative writing assignment. She thought her experience would be a great help to

the student. She also agreed that there needs to be more resources for tutors concerning creative writing. The second tutor admitted that even with her experience with creative writing she still wouldn't know where to start if a creative writing student came to her in the writing center. Among the others I spoke to there were writing associates that were not familiar with creative writing. They collectively said that they have confidence in themselves that they can offer a perspective and feedback on creative writing work because they've read before. One said, "I have read a book before," which goes to show that there is a certain amount of standard knowledge that writing associates have that can be helpful and fresh while reading short fiction or poetry. However, one writing associate who is not an English major did shake a little bit at the thought of a student coming in to the writing center to work on poetry. This is understandable because I've been in literature classes with many English majors who dread reading poetry. Poetry seems to have the reputation that it is an uncrack-able code. The writing associate's mention of this fear showed me that there is an insecurity among tutors in the Trinity College writing center with creative writing. In order to ease that fear, I told them of what I planned on creating for writing associates (a handout outlining suggestions, tips and guidelines for a session with a creative writer), which they thought would be very helpful.

There are a couple of different ways tutors can be trained that will help ease their anxiety while working with creative writing students. One way that I created, is a simple handout for the use of tutors only that will offer definitions, suggestions, do's and don'ts, and questions that will be beneficial when presented with a session with a creative writer. Bonnie Devet talks about this method of training in her article "Training Writing Lab Consultants to Help Fiction Writers." There were the same feelings of inadequacy in her tutors at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. Tutors were intimidated when a fiction writer would come into an

appointment because they saw themselves as not as “original” as these writers and therefore unable to give valid feedback. Devet says that to combat these feelings consultants were having, the writing lab had a creative writing student, Alicia Hatter, come up with a handout for tutors as well. Devet also suggests role playing. During training, tutors would take on the roles of either tutor or student and then the tutor would utilize the handout to conduct a mock appointment with a creative writing student. Devet says role playing will offer “practice” which should allow “consultants [to] be less apprehensive in working with fiction writers” (Devet 6).

In order to utilize the training tutors will receive, creative writers need to use the writing center. Two questions that come up concerning creative writing students in the writing center are: Is it true that creative writers don’t use the writing center? And, if so, why don’t they use the writing center? At Trinity College over the past three years, from December of 2012 to December of 2015, the writing center has had 5,439 appointments and of those appointments 29 of them were made by students wanting to work on an assignment they had for a class they were taking with a creative writing professor. This tells us that out of all the appointments made at the writing center over the course of three years .53% of them had to do with creative writing; that is half of 1% of all appointments during that time. The data was pulled from the Trinity College writing center system that logs information about every appointment made at the writing center. From the data, it can be concluded that creative writers don’t regularly use the writing center, they very rarely use it.

The main reason, I’ve found by talking to creative writing students, why creative writers don’t use the writing center comes from a fear that the tutor they will work with has no knowledge of fiction, poetry, or any other type of creative writing, which would inhibit they’re

ability to give productive feedback. Interestingly, the reason creative writers at Trinity aren't using the writing center is the same reason tutors are wary of them using it. I talked to a class of introductory level creative writing students about their experience with creative writing in the writing center and what has limited their experience. Some did not know about the writing center or had ever used it before. The ones who did, had only used it for analytical papers. One student did go to the writing center for a short story assignment, but only to work on shifting tenses, not for feedback on content, structure, or word choice. From my discussion with these students it seems they had never thought of going to the writing center for their poetry or short stories.

Many of the appointments made at the Trinity College writing center include students wanting to work on analytical papers and freshman, who are encouraged to use the writing center by their professors. Almost 63% of appointments made over the past three years have been by first year students. After taking a creative writing class and talking to my professor I can say that creative writing professors don't verbally tell their classes to use the writing center, whereas writing, psychology, and first year seminar professors are among the majority who tell their students to use the writing center. These professors are giving their students constant verbal reminders to use the writing center more often than a creative writing professor, which correlates with the mentality most students have of the writing center, which is that it is a place for specific academic writing.

After talking to a creative writing professor at Trinity, I have found that many creative writing professors think the writing center is a great resource for their creative writing students. After bringing attention towards the fact that students may not always be working with tutors

who are creative writers or English majors Ethan Rutherford, a creative writing professor at Trinity, still believed that the writing center can be valuable for his students. He said that even if some tutors are not familiar with the vocabulary used in a creative writing class they still have vocabulary and are still able to talk about a piece of writing. He said, "Readers are readers." He also brought up that faculty is willing and should work with students and the writing center in order to create a part of this writing community, which the writing center has already built, for creative writers. This is important because building a space for creative writers in the writing center will need tutors who are prepared to tutor those students, students to actually tutor, and faculty who will encourage their students to use the writing center for their creative works; it will take all three to make it happen and put a truly great resource to use.

Furthermore, I have designed two resources that address tutors and students in connection to creative writing in the writing center. Tutors need more knowledge on creative writing and how they can help creative writers. I have created a simple, three page handout that lays out the types of creative writing, their writing processes, ways to structure an appointment, things to do, things not to do, and questions to ask a student for the purpose of informing writing associates about creative writing in the writing center. I would suggest that this handout would be distributed to the writing associates at a staff meeting and discussed, so that we are all on the same page and have some training that creative writers will benefit from. The second resource I created is a bookmark designed to be distributed to creative writing students in their classes. The bookmark contains quotes from a professor and student, and other information welcoming creative writers to use the writing center. The handout will help writing associates gain confidence in their abilities to help creative writers, and the bookmark will inform creative writers that the writing center can be used for their work, which will increase the amount of

creative writers the writing center will see. As a result of more creative writers coming to the writing center, the collaboration between writing associate and writer will create a bigger and more diverse writing community.

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