ABSTRACT

COMMUNITY MATTERS: WRITING CENTER CONSULTANTS' CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY, EXPERTISE, AND DISCIPLINARY WRITING

By Emma Boddy

This thesis investigates how undergraduate writing center consultants' engagement in their disciplinary and writing center communities mutually inform their conceptions of their disciplinary and consultant identity, expertise, and writing values. Through the lens of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), I analyze data from interviews with seven consultants to understand how writing consultants' identities as writers and consultants are influenced by their academic disciplines and writing center training as well as explore the impact of disciplinary expertise on consulting strategies, addressing the question of how writing center consultants conceptualize, adapt, and engage with disciplinary affiliations and expertise during consultations. From this analysis, I detail implications for threshold concept-based tutor training on the development of consultant identity and provide recommendations for consultant development that focuses on working with disciplinary writers. Ultimately, this thesis explores participants' perceptions, stories, and values as disciplinary writers and writing center consultants, arguing that consultants' insights can inform and contribute to research on writing identity, disciplinary writing, and expertise, and enrich the very disciplinary and writing center communities of which they are members.

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Table of Contents

Dedication

To my parents, who are all at once my inspiration, my support, and my joy. This one is for you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and sincerest thanks to several people, without whom this thesis certainly could not have been completed:

To my thesis chair, Dr. Jason Palmeri, your mentorship has meant the world to me. It is not an exaggeration to say that I would not be in this field, let alone the teacher, researcher, and person I am, without your thoughtful, steadfast, and generous guidance.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis analyzes how writing center consultants navigate their layered disciplinary identities and documents the stories that consultants tell themselves to make sense of their identities and expertise within different communities of practice. When I think about how to articulate the story of how I came to this research, I think about which of my identities has most influenced my work—is this the story of my research through the lens of my identity as a researcher, or my identity as a member of the writing center community?

If I am centering my identity as a researcher and young scholar, I could tell you about how my first research question in the field of writing studies emerged from my own experiences as an undergraduate double major and the questions that I had about the transfer of skills and identities between disciplinary contexts. Or how, ever since I passed through the portal of new understanding for the threshold concept that writing enacts and creates identities (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), every inquiry I embark on seems to share that central thread. Or how as soon as I entered the space of the writing center, even as I was in training to become a consultant, it was the research part of my mind that I could feel sparking with so much possibility.

Or is it my story as a writing center tutor and administrator? For this, I would weave a narrative about impassioned discussions of threshold concepts in tutor training, allowing me to see them in a whole new light. And, I could tell the story of equally impassioned conversations in the consultant lounge in between consultations on everything from the best consulting spot in the writing center (objectively, it is the middle-right, cushioned by two whiteboards and right by a window) to what we were struggling with in our own coursework. I realized—especially as I transitioned from my role as a tutor to my new one as a graduate assistant director—that beyond the specific question I wanted to ask, I wanted my research to open and hold space for consultants to share the incredibly insightful, meaningful thoughts that they have every day working in the writing center.

The truth is, it is both. Within the writing center community, I am both a researcher, a former consultant, and a current administrator. The nexus and interaction of those identities led me to this research from its core concepts to my perspectives that influenced how I frame interview questions. And—as this thesis will demonstrate within a specific context—even as we possess different roles and different facets of our identity, we are one person, and those multiple facets of identities must be negotiated to form a whole self.

And so, the story of this research goes something like this.

I've always been interested in the intersection of disciplinary context and writing identity. I was drawn to this topic because of my undergraduate experience as a double major in Professional Writing and Psychology, but my interest was reinforced as I did research studying how students' writer identities created an avenue for transfer between disciplinary contexts. Then, I came to the writing center—first as a consultant and now as an administrator and I realized what a rich site writing centers are for studying disciplinary writing. Endlessly interested in all of the smart

complexities lurking under the surface of consultants' casual conversations in the writing centers, I knew my thesis would strive to center consultant voices, discovering the insights they bring to the table in writing centers and writing studies conversations on identity, disciplinary writing, expertise, and threshold concepts.

Thus, this thesis investigates how undergraduate writing center consultants' disciplinary and consultant identities are mutually influenced by not only each other, but also how they value writing, conceptualize disciplinary participation, and navigate disciplinary writing within the writing center. Through the framework of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), I explore how participants' disciplinary and consultant identities influence, align with, and create tension between each other as they navigate their role in the writing center and positionality as a consultant. I ask consultants about the ways in which they do (and do not) engage their disciplinary writing identities and expertise when they are consulting with writers from all disciplines. This analysis is then consolidated for the purpose of providing implications for threshold concept-based training on the development of consultant identity and recommendations for consultant development specifically geared toward attending to the nuances of working with disciplinary writing. In other words, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. How are writing consultants' identities as writers and consultants influenced by their academic disciplines and their writing center training?
2. How do writing center consultants conceptualize, adopt, acknowledge, and engage with disciplinary affiliations and expertise during consultations?
3. How can we create and extend consultant development programming to support consultants in drawing upon and adapting their own disciplinary and writing center knowledge to work with writers in diverse disciplines?

The rest of Chapter One builds a foundation for these questions to be addressed by reviewing relevant literature on disciplines, identity, and expertise and applying these concepts to the site of writing centers, as well as introducing the theoretical framework of communities of practice, which provides rich concepts and shared language to discuss findings for the writing center and disciplinary communities that consultants are members of. Finally, the first chapter closes with the methods section, which details data collection and analysis, provides key information about my participants, and, in greater detail, explains the impact of my positionality as an insider to the community I am researching in a positionality statement.

Literature Review

In the past 30 years, much of the focus on preparing tutors to help students with disciplinary writing has been on the respective benefits and drawbacks of generalist and specialist training (Hubbach, 1988; Kiedaisch & Dinitz, 2001; Powers & Nelson, 1995; Tinberg & Cupples, 1996; Walker, 1998). However, in the reality of the writing center, this binary of tutors as either generalists or specialists falls apart because most writing centers function somewhere in the middle of this junction in terms of training (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016), and tutors are often switching from generalist to specialist from consultation to consultation as they work with writers (Devet, 2014). In light of this, many scholars have proposed alternative or additional methods for training consultants to work with writers within and across the disciplines including

genre theory (Gordan, 2014; Walker, 1998), ecocomposition and metagenre (Devet, 2014), and discourse communities and metacognitive dialogue (McGovern, 2022). Thus, by understanding "[writing] centers as hubs for writing in the disciplines" we are able to recognize both the complexity of the task we are asking tutors to do in consulting with writers across the disciplines and the importance of tutor training that contends with these shifting challenges (Devet, 2014, p. 5). Drawing from and extending on this research for training tutors to work with writers in and across the disciplines, and theories of disciplinarity, identity, and expertise, this literature review seeks to provide a foundation for my research to address the following questions:

1. How are disciplines conceptualized in writing studies and writing centers? What impacts do their academic disciplines have on writing center consultants?
2. How does writing center consultants' myriad of identities (writer, disciplinary, consultant) impact their participation in the writing center and their strategies for a consultation?
3. What does it mean for a consultant to have disciplinary expertise and how does that impact a consultation? What is considered to be a consultant's writing expertise?

Disciplines, Community, & Identity

Disciplines are a monumental force in writing studies, especially in the post-process shift of the last few decades (Carter, 2007; Gere et al., 2015; Hendricks 2018; Malenczyk et al., 2018; McCarthy, 1987). In the writing center, disciplinarity is a central topic, because we support all academic writers from all disciplines on all types of writing (Bourelle, 2009). My entry point into this large and complex conversation is analyzing how consultants, rather than writers, conceptualize disciplines and what intersections or frictions exist between their disciplinary identity and their identity as a consultant for the writing center. And, I argue, that writing center consultants' insights can contribute more broadly to the conversation about writing in the disciplines.

My conception of disciplines is heavily influenced by Carter's (2007) characterization of disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and writing. Thus, instead of understanding disciplines as merely a delivery system for specialized content knowledge and considering only how a consultant's disciplinary content knowledge impacts their consultation strategies, the frame of ways of knowing and doing that influence ways of writing within a discipline provides a window into understanding the ways in which consultants' conceptions of writing formed in their disciplines are inextricably tied to that disciplines ways of knowing and doing. In other words, disciplinary writing reflects disciplinary values. This thesis investigates how consultants' values and conceptions of writing from their academic disciplines influence, and is in turn are influenced by, the development of their consultant identity and consultant expertise in the writing center community.

Additionally, these ways of knowing and doing form "scholarly communities", otherwise known as disciplinary communities of practice that endow their epistemological perspectives to their members (faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, etc.) (Gere et al., 2015, p. 244). Although conceptually disciplines can be understood as a complex, networked community with a common intellectual enterprise and epistemological methods, disciplines are often visualized as

academic departments because they are crystallized in institutional structures as such in order to advocate for resources and illuminate career paths for members (Gere et al., 2015; Malenczyk et al., 2018). This question of how disciplines—and, by extension, disciplinary participation—are perceived is important to this study because I investigate writing center consultants' (i.e. undergraduate students) conceptions of disciplinary membership.

Drawing from Carter (2007), Malenczyk et al., (2018), Gere et al., (2015), and Hyland (2015), I understand disciplines as intellectual enterprises that cultivate disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and writing, which members learn and adopt as they participate in and are enculturated into the disciplinary community. This definition of disciplines is interconnected with the ideas of participation, community, and identity. For writing, disciplines are inextricably linked to community and identity because disciplines and their genres construct the rhetorical choices that writers can make (Hyland, 2015). Disciplines, then, cultivate identity through participation in a disciplinary community (Hyland, 2015). Studying the process of enculturation into a disciplinary community is useful for understanding how consultants navigate and negotiate their identity and conceptions of writing. If we understand disciplines as structures that are defined by "shared, collective desires of people to understand some aspects of the world (Malenczyk et al., 2018, p. 89), then it stands to reason that the shared values of writing and identity derived from their discipline will affect their work in the writing center as they work with writers from all disciplines. Therefore, in the next section, I turn to the importance of identity in the writing center and its implications for studying the multidimensional identities of consultants as writers, disciplinary members, and writing center consultants.

Identity in the Writing Center

In writing studies, much inquiry has been undertaken on the relationship between writing and the construction of the writer's identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ivanič, 1998; McCarthy, 1987). In the writing center, this attention to identity seems to be part of its fabric. Much of the scholarship on identity in writing centers focuses on the identity of the writing center itself (Boquet & Lerner, 2008; North 1984), the scholarly and institutional identity of writing center administrators (Geller & Denny, 2013; Perdue & Driscoll, 2017) and the identity of the student writers who use the center (Cox, 2016; Denny, 2010; Denny & Towle, 2017). And, necessarily, identity plays a key role in shaping scholarly work on models and pedagogies for equity and inclusion in the writing center (Coenen et al., 2019; Diab et al., 2012; Rylander, 2011).

I am particularly interested in how scholars approach inquiries into consultant identity. This thread of research has explored the ways in which consultants' identity impacts their experience in the writing center community, including how narratives construct, reconstruct and share their identities as writing center consultants (Carroll, 2008) and how consultants' identity develops through their participation in the writing center (Hall, 2011). Additionally, research focused specifically on consultants' identity, tends to be referenced more implicitly, and often for the purpose of investigating tutorial authority and power dynamics that affect consultants (Bitzel, 2013; Devet, 2021; Hemmeter, 1994).

In my research, I build off of this foundation of research by making explicit the concept of consultant identity. I posit that consultant identity is a result of consultants' unique and dual positioning as both peer and professional (Ervin, 2016) but also is mutually influenced by their disciplinary writing identity. Additionally, extending the work of Carroll (2008) and Hall (2011) which demonstrates various methods by which consultants are enculturated into the writing center as a community of practice and their identity formed and performed (Wenger, 1998), I view consultant identity as constructed and renegotiated through participation in the writing center community. Finally, I conceptualize consultant's identities as highly dependent on their tutor training experience. Answering the call of Watson (2012) for critical examination of tutor training and its impact on identity formation, I investigate how participants' consultant identities are built on the foundation of a training model that introduces key threshold concepts of writing studies (Adler-Kassner, & Wardle, 2015) in relation to the writing center and their role as consultants, causing them to internalize and enact these writing center values.

Disciplinary and Consultant Expertise in Writing Centers

Writing center scholarship has recognized the ways in which consultants' disciplinary expertise—which can be understood as the disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and writing (Carter, 2007) that consultants gain as a result of their engagement in their academic disciplines—and the strategies that they use to work with writers are mutually influential. Many of these studies have been particularly concerned with the extent to which a generalist vs. specialist orientation toward tutor training encourages directive vs. non-directive strategies (e.g. Brooks, 1991; Healy & Clark, 1996; Shamoon & Burns, 1995). Extending this conversation with empirical research, Dinitz and Harrington (2014) found that directive strategies, instead of threatening the agency of the writer, enhanced the collaboration between consultant and writer. These directive strategies were much more often observed when the consultant had disciplinary expertise in common with the writer. While my research does not focus on this specific lens of directive vs. nondirective strategies, it does build on this idea of how shared disciplinary expertise between consultant and writer impacts the strategies a consultant uses to help the writer. And, as my analysis will demonstrate, consultants reported on not only how their disciplinary expertise impacted their strategies, but how their moves and perspectives during consultations were influenced by the expertise that they have as a writing center consultant—expertise which they gained through the training course and articulated clearly and readily. Therefore, this thesis contributes to this conversation about the relationship between consultants' disciplinary expertise and consulting strategies by considering what writing expertise consultants garner through their involvement in the writing center and how that expertise interacts with disciplinary expertise to construct their consulting strategies.

Central to this discussion of expertise is the idea that consultants bring their perspectives, expertise, and identities of their disciplines to their consultations. Thus, the question of transfer—when, what, and how consultants are repurposing (or purposefully not drawing on) their experiences in their discipline—becomes relevant to the question of expertise. Transfer is a concept fundamentally important to writing centers (Devet, 2015) and by conceptualizing transfer as rhetorical (Nowacek, 2011), linked to identity (Wardle & Clement, 2017), and facilitated by threshold concepts (Adler-Kassner et al., 2016), we can better understand how

consultants' engagement in various communities—and the identities, expertise, and values they learn within them—influence their practice.

To address the role of transfer in the writing center and more specifically, in the work of writing center consultants, research has investigated how consultants are conceptualizing and applying transfer by incorporating a transfer-focused curriculum into their tutor education courses (Cardinal, 2018; Hill, 2016). Driscoll (2015) investigates how transfer-based tutor training has benefits for consultants outside of the writing center. In other words, Driscoll (2015) studies how consultants' expertise gained from their tutor training—including their meta-knowledge about transfer—is repurposed in their academic education more broadly, including their learning in their disciplines. Recognizing this mutual influence, my research investigates the inverse—how consultants' disciplinary expertise, combined with the expertise gained from their tutor training course, impacts their strategies for consulting. Of particular interest to me are studies that have focused on a specific aspect of transfer—prior knowledge (Robertson et al., 2012)—its application to writing center pedagogy, and the attitudes toward and conceptions of transfer that consultants developed through the tutor training (Carillo, 2020; Stock & Leichty, 2022). Through the analysis of training meeting transcripts and a post-training survey (Stock & Leichty, 2022) and observations, audio-recorded consultations, and follow-up interviews with consultants (Carillo, 2020), these two studies represent a conglomerate of methods used to provide insight into consultants' attitudes and reflections toward a transfer-based model of tutor training. Centering consultants and their perspectives is at the heart of my work, and this research seeks to evaluate the ways in which a threshold concept-based model of training is impacting consultants' writing center expertise.

Widening this scope of research on the transfer of expertise to writing center consultations, my research seeks to understand the ways in which consultants' disciplinary identities and the expertise that comes from that experience impacts and is repurposed during consultations. By bringing together the concepts of identity and expertise, we can better understand how the consultant as a multifaceted individual in a particular positionality enacts their various kinds of expertise within the context of a consultation (Cepero, 2014).

In addition to considering how and when consultants might be repurposing their disciplinary perspectives and expertise, we also must consider the way their consultant expertise—in short, the expertise, knowledge, and perspectives on writing that they adopt as a result of working as a consultant—impact their consulting strategies. This line of inquiry, therefore, requires a more thorough investigation into the concept of consultant expertise—when and where is this expertise gained? What are its attributes? How is consultant expertise applied in the writing center?

Consultants' expertise may be partially attributed to the affordances that come from their positionality within the writing center as a peer to writers, which grants them unique perspectives and expertise (Ervin, 2016). In fact, much research has been dedicated to describing and naming the affordances of consultants' dual roles. Bruffee (1984) highlights how the process of peer tutoring facilitates community and creates new knowledge, which positions consultants as "practitioner-researchers" (Ianetta & Fitzgerald, 2012 p. 9). And, because consultants are equipped with writing expertise and work to help writers and provide guidance, they are professionals as well as peers (Ervin, 2016). Based on this reasoning, Ervin (2016) argues that

consultants inhabit a liminal space that positions them to identify researchable problems and conduct research to offer solutions that their unique role as cultural informants and practitioners in the writing center allows them to identify. Any way that scholarship names and theorizes writing center consultants' positionality within the center, one thing is clear— consultants' "informed and informing perspectives on the conversations of writing studies" are born from their positionality and provide the basis for valuable contributions to the field (Ianetta & Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 10).

Consultant expertise can be conceptualized as "toolkits", where consultants can sift through text-based strategies such as "reading aloud, identifying problem patterns, and editing" as well as discussion-based strategies which include "asking the writer to summarize the text or larger project, asking questions about the rhetorical context of the project, and conversations about general writing strategies" (Summers, 2016, p. 132). The concept of toolkit helps to "break down the binary of expertise and experience" because consultants can identify relative gaps of expertise or inexperience with a discipline, genre, etc., and employ a different strategy based on their expertise as a consultant (i.e. another tool from their toolkit) to fill that gap (Summers, 2016, p. 132). Beyond being useful in application during consultations, these strategies are representative of expertise that writing consultants have gained through their writing expertise and tutor training, which can include thinking rhetorically about writing, reflecting on writing strategies and processes, and avenues for collaboration with the writer.

Drawing from this literature, my data, and conversations with consultants as a result of being a GA at the writing center, I define consultant expertise as the repertoire of practice and the collection of knowledge, skills, and perspectives that consultants gain from their experience in the writing center community—including the consultant training course and their subsequent experiences consulting. Consultant expertise encompasses expertise about writing, including avenues for thinking critically about writing (such as metacognitive awareness of writing processes, writing as rhetorical, writing through the lens of metagenres, etc.) and skills-based writing expertise, ranging from higher-order concerns such as organization, argument, and genre conventions to lower-order concerns such as sentence structure, grammar, etc. Consultants' expertise can also include broadened perspectives on writing including strategies for working with multilingual writers, writing in the disciplines, etc. that form new conceptions about writing (i.e. that grammar rules can enforce Standard Academic English which can be a mechanism for linguistic oppression and that successful writing is dependent on purpose and context). And, for consultants at the HWC, their learning during the training coursework and subsequent experience in the center is built upon writing studies' threshold concepts for writers, writing, and learning. By making these values explicit and integrating them into the fabric of consultants' experiences, these threshold concepts become the cornerstone of their consultant expertise.

Consultants' expertise can be drawn upon and utilized in consultations (Summers, 2016), in their coursework outside of the writing center (Driscoll, 2015), and in other aspects of their work in the writing center (Cepero, 2014). Another way in which consultant expertise is operationalized is through research that they conduct as undergraduate tutors. Kinkead (2011) asserts that because of efforts from the field to create spaces for undergraduate research, "undergraduates who tutor are the most likely authors of scholarly and research essays in writing studies" (p. 150). Connecting consultants to the field of writing studies and advocating for their scholarly

abilities, Kinkead can make this claim because of the history of writing centers with opening and holding space for consultant research through peer tutor-specific conferences or events at conferences (e.g. the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference or IWCA's undergraduate research forum) as well as journals dedicated to young scholars in the field of writing studies (e.g. *Young Scholars in Writing*) and opportunities to be published in journals of the field (e.g. the "Tutor's Column" in *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal's* Undergraduate Research Special issue). This thesis investigates consultant expertise in two facets— how consultant identity and expertise are negotiated and renegotiated in relation to a participant's disciplinary identity and expertise, and how consultant expertise affects the strategies consultants use to work with writing across disciplines. In the next section, I describe the theory of communities of practice, which constructs a frame of analysis through which I explore these key concepts of disciplines, identity, and expertise in conjunction with my interview data.

Theoretical Framework

I turn to the communities of practice theory in order to understand how consultants navigate between their disciplinary communities of practice and the writing center communities of practice. More specifically, I draw on this framework to address the following research questions:

1. How are writing consultants' identities as writers and consultants influenced by their academic disciplines and their writing center training?
2. How do writing center consultants conceptualize, adopt, acknowledge, and engage with disciplinary affiliations and expertise during consultations?
3. How can we develop and extend consultant development programming to support consultants in drawing upon and adapting their own disciplinary and writing center knowledge to work with writers in diverse disciplines?

Toward this end, I start by outlining a few of the key elements of a community of practice and their application to my research. Next, I focus on how the communities of practice framework conceptualizes identity and preview a few of the ways I will apply this framework in analyzing participant interview in the data analysis chapter. Finally, I review recent applications of communities of practice theory in writing center studies in conversation with this research.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice is a term coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger to demonstrate the complex set of social relationships within a community which forms "a living curriculum" that promotes learning in members through enculturation (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 4). To be a community of practice, members must constitute three central elements: shared domain, shared community, and shared practice.

The domain of a community of practice marks the shared interest, competence (expertise), and commitment of members. For writing center consultants, this represents their common endeavor

of learning more about writing and developing their consulting practices to best work with and support the writers that come into the center. Within the community of practice of the Howe Writing Center (HWC), consultants share expertise in writing concepts and strategies based on threshold concepts and strategies for working with writers based on the values of collaboration, continued learning, and metacognition.

In a community of practice, members of the community must interact with, learn from, and care about each other. The network of relationships in a community of practice is built across joint activities and collaborative discussions that facilitate learning within the community. In the HWC, these relationships and the learning they facilitate/enable happen across activities and spaces. For example, as part of their ongoing development, consultants might engage in a structured activity that puts them in groups and asks them to work together through a consulting scenario. Or, an impromptu conversation might happen in the consultant lounge about an issue where consultants share a problem they are experiencing, and bonding and mentoring happens through other consultants' responses.

Finally, members of a community of practice must also be practitioners. Consultants do not just learn how to and discuss consulting—the most significant portion of their time at the writing center is spent actively consulting with writers. Through dedicated time and consistent interaction, consultants have "develop[ed] a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015 p. 2). Indeed, consultants' resources are shared in the sense that they all have access to the same resources on the HWC's website and learning management system, but also shared in that through the common experience of training and continued professional development, there is a shared sense of identifying, working through, and solving problems.

Identity in Practice

Because communities of practice represent a way of social learning, participation in a community of practice necessitates the negotiation of identity as a result of this learning. The "experience of identity in practice" rather than self-image or self-perception, is "a way of being in the world" (Wenger, 1998, p.154). In other words, identity in practice, rather than being a mental or internal construct, serves as a lens through which intention and action can be understood. Identity in practice serves as a useful framework to analyze consultants' disciplinary writing identities because it conceptualizes identity as a negotiated experience, as community membership, and as the nexus of multimembership (Wenger, 1998). These three attributions of identity are crucial to understanding how consultants' experiences from their disciplinary communities of practice are impacting their approach to and strategies for consulting and vice versa. And, understanding the writing center as a community of practice suggests that it is necessary to consider consultants' identities when analyzing their values and conceptions of writing that they adopt through tutor training, and actualize as strategies during consultations.

Identity is not a stagnant construct. Instead, it is in constant flux, always being negotiated and renegotiated—but it is not just that external forces (experiences, actions) are acting upon identity. Rather, it is the act of negotiation that is constitutive of identity. As Wenger (1998) describes, "in the same way that meaning exists in its negotiation, identity exists—not as an

object in and of itself— but in the constant work of negotiating the self" (p. 151). For consultants, this means that the myriad of intellectual, social, and emotional experiences are not only acting upon their identity, merely being integrated into an already coalesced concept, but are the exigence for identity renegotiation, in which identity is reconceptualized and reformed to integrate those experiences. This process might happen most drastically throughout training but continues as long as they are members and practitioners of the community of practice.

Community membership then, shapes identity within a community. Ongoing participation, or engagement in the community through action and connection with other members, means new experiences, which results in ongoing negotiation of a member's identity within that community. On the other hand, there is reification, which in communities of practice represents the process by which the abstract (identity) is coalesced and treated as something concrete and relatively stable. Reification of identity happens when we write a narrative about our experiences, committing the words to paper and sharing that representation of our identity with others. But, reification of identity conceptually can lead to fixed, unchanging conceptions of identity, which discounts the impact of ongoing participation. Geller et al. (2007) characterize the forces that shape identity as "the centrifugal pull of reification and the centripetal push of participation", a process that strikes a balance somewhere in the middle to constitute a flexible yet knowable sense of identity and meaning (p. 18). Take the example of writing. Too much reification and a draft will never be done, the writer always tinkering with that sentence or rearranging this paragraph. But too little reification and a piece of writing will be done and sent before revising can even be considered.

Additionally, Wenger (1998) argues that to be a member of a community of practice is to be competent within that "familiar territory"—to know the language, the social conventions, the reasons behind actions, and the structures that members are beholden to (p. 152). Thus, within that community of practice, our membership *is* our identity, through our forms of participation and through these shared markers of competence. Therefore, Wenger's dimensions of competence become three dimensions of identity: mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire.

Mutuality of engagement is the ways in which we learn from and became who we are through our interactions with members of the community; these interactions reveal the underlying values of practice and define the individual in regard to the community. For example, during a consultation (and as I will explain more in-depth later in Allison's participant spotlight) a consultant may have to subsume their individual writing preferences, processes, or values to maintain the agency of the writer and the disciplinary expectations of their writing during a consultation. When this happens, it is reconcilable because, within the writing center's community of practice, collaboration between the consultant and writer is incredibly important. One of the first pieces of literature that consultants in training read is Andrea Lunsford's (1991) "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," followed by a discussion of shared authority and strategies for consulting that promote and protect the writer's agency over their own process and work. In other words, who a participant is and what they value might be different in one community of practice than another. But, their multiple, community-specific identities are reconcilable under their holistic identity because they identify as members of multiple communities simultaneously. Thus, participants can prioritize the methods of

engagement of the community that they are in the current context of, while negotiating how their perceptions and actions are impacting their identity not just within, but across communities of practice.

Secondly, accountability to an enterprise describes the ways in which members develop a way of seeing the world; this perspective then illuminates and shadows certain conditions and possibilities, causing members to have a tendency "to engage in certain actions, to make certain choices, [and] to value certain experiences" (Wenger, 1998, p. 153). As my research will show, consultants valued and applied learning from their training experience. Common actions emerge in the form of consultant strategies that both come from that training and from each other. For example, because we discuss the importance of forefronting writer agency and practice of reading a paper out loud in training, many consultants, when it is time to dive into the writing, will ask the writer if they want to read the writing out loud, offer a choice of who reads it out loud. Furthermore, participation in the writing center community beyond working consulting hours is valued and so consultants often make the choice to join a—or, in some cases, all of the—SIGs (Special Interest Groups) such as the Social Media SIG, Community SIG, Creative Writing SIG, Book Club SIG, etc.

Finally, the negotiability of a repertoire represents the means by which members of the community engage with the histories of the community's practice through a "personal history of participation" which includes notable memories, references, experiences, etc. (p. 153). A member's personal history of participation factor heavily into how identity is negotiated in regards to the repertoire of practice. In interviews, consultants discussed landmark readings, go-to resources, and foundational experiences within the writing center—in other words, their personal history of participation—that heavily influenced their consultant identity.

We belong to many communities, in many different ways, at many different times and places. Thus, Wenger (1998) argues for identity as the nexus of multimembership—the "ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity" (p.149). This includes understanding both the "experience of multimembership" and "the work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries" (p. 158). Identity as the nexus of multimembership recognizes that while we may act differently, gain new perspectives, and emphasize certain aspects of ourselves when engaging in different communities of practice, to think of those identities as separate is to miss the nuances of how our participation and membership inform one another. Consultants are not only working with writing in different disciplinary communities of practice every day, but the consultants themselves are members in multiple communities of practice simultaneously, all of which contribute to their identity as a writer and a consultant. In using the term consultant identity and grounding it in the framework of communities of practice, I hope to show that "because our identities are not something we turn on and off" (p. 159), consulting identity and disciplinary writing identity mutually influence and impact each other, both in the contexts of consulting at the writing center and disciplinary writing tasks.

To understand identity as a whole rather than fragmented pieces is to recognize that one must have a way of managing "competing demands" from different practices in a way that maintains the bounds of one's identity (p. 159). This is where the work of reconciliation comes in, which

Wenger believes to be "the most significant challenge faced by learners who move from one community of practice to another" (p. 160). Multimembership necessitates an identity that can reconcile when practices, values, and expectations of one membership in a community of practice are at odds with another. This reconciliation—and the nexus of an identity that results from this work—takes many forms; some cases might result in harmonious resolution while others may continually field tensions that may never fully dissipate. However, tension should not be viewed negatively or as a failure of reconciliation. Instead, the presence of tension indicates an effort, often a sustained effort, to achieve workable co-existence of memberships. The two case studies of Allison and Teddy will illuminate the complicated and at times, fraught, work of reconciliation that constructs an identity that can account for and enable them to be members and practitioners of their disciplinary and the writing center's communities of practice. Their examples will reinforce Wenger's (1998) claim that the work of reconciliation "is not simply an additional concern for an independently defined identity viewed as a unitary object; rather, it is at the core of what it means to be a person" (p. 160-161). Applying this to the community of practice of the writing center, I argue that this work of reconciliation is at the heart of what it means to be a writing consultant.

Understanding identity as layered and negotiated, as community membership, and as the nexus of multimembership helps illuminate the connective threads of how consultants' internalized writing values (from both their disciplinary and consulting identity) impact what consulting strategies they use universally and when with writers in specific communities of practice. And, most notable for analyzing my findings is that identity in practice, according to Wenger, does not require self-identification. So even if consultants are unsure about their relationship with the writing center as a discipline/community of practice (or, as we will see in Teddy's case, actively denying identification with it as a field), if they are engaging in these dimensions of community and identity—mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire—then they are a member within that community of practice.

Communities of Practice &Writing Centers

Writing studies scholars have recognized communities of practice as a useful framework for the field. Drawing on and extending the research done on communities of practice in the writing center, I will use this framework to analyze my participants' relationship between their consultant and disciplinary identities, which informs their writing values and conceptions as well as their consulting strategies.

Writing center research has investigated how tutor training serves as a method for inducting consultants into the writing center's community of practice through the exploration and negotiation of their identity within that writing center community. Emphasizing Wenger's idea of identity as fluid and in constant negotiation, Carroll (2008) explores how consultants' narratives create and recreate themselves in the context and space of the writing center. Carroll (2008) describes that throughout a ten-week preparation course, tutors complete weekly narrative journaling with no assigned prompts as they read and consider theories, stories, and positions of the writing center. These journals function as consultant narratives, in which they construct, reflect, and share their identities and how they see themselves as writing center consultants. In

other words, consultants' mutual engagement with the histories, practices, and values of the writing center community carves out a personal identity trajectory within the community of practice. Building off of Carroll's (2008) investigation into identities in the writing center, I am studying two distinct facets of identity— consultant identity and disciplinary identity—and analyzing consultant interviews to understand how simultaneous and mutual engagement in the communities of practice of the writing center and of their discipline inform how they value and conceptualize writing. In other words, Carroll (2008) establishes that consultants understand writing center values through mutual engagement (one form of which can be narratives). In this thesis, I am researching how an understanding of writing center values as a result of that mutual engagement impacts consultants' disciplinary writing identity and vice versa. Thus, using the communities of practice framework to study consultant identity in the writing center illuminates how our practices as writing center administrators can incorporate consultants' past experiences (including their disciplinary identity and expertise) into the writing center's community of practice, strengthening and defining their personal trajectory within the writing center community.

Communities of practice is a useful framework for understanding consultants' enculturation into a writing center's community of practice because its foundational principles can be applied to various methods and approaches to tutor training. Extending Carroll's (2008) line of inquiry into how consultants come to understand themselves in relation to the writing center's community of practice, Hall (2011) explores how the method of blogging, scaffolded with for the purpose of dialogic reflection, constructs consultants as part of the writing center community of practice. The aspect of communities of practice theory that understands participation as learning, and learning as participation is particularly useful for investigating both the explicit and implicit instruction that facilitates learning, especially for new consultants. This indicates a reciprocal and transformative relationship between consultants' learning and identity and writing center practices (Hall, 2011). Recognizing this crucial relationship, I asked consultants to reflect on their consulting practices, values, and identity in relation to the writing center. Ultimately, with the question about whether or not they consider themselves to be part of writing center studies as a discipline, I asked consultants to engage in critical reflection about what they consider to be constitutive of participation and membership in a disciplinary community. As my research will show, a threshold concept-based consultant training course provides an explicit introduction to writing center principles. As participants reflect on their participation in the community as both a trainee and practitioner, they articulate the ways in which their learning within the community constructs their consultant identity and consulting strategies. Building off of Hall's (2021) conclusions about the benefits of blogging as a method for participation, my participant responses also inform implications drawn as to how writing center administrators can scaffold further explicit and implicit participation. Furthermore, a communities of practice framework allows for a conception of expertise that is local, collective, and dynamic. Hall (2011) writes that "in a writing center community of practice, expertise is not possessed by individuals; rather, it is emergent within their transactions, mediated, not only by resources, such as expert knowledge supplied in the tutor-education course but also by tools such as the blog. As their posts demonstrate, a communities-of-practice theory of learning brings to the fore the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing through dialogue among tutors" (p. 103). Understanding the writing center as a community of practice illuminates the varied expertise that consultants have, as well as the avenues within the writing center where they gain that expertise

via relational and learning experiences. In this thesis, I apply this conception of expertise within a community to understand how consultants' disciplinary writing expertise emerges (or purposefully does not emerge) in writing consultations when they share that disciplinary background with the writer. These strategies are shaped by these "dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing through dialogue" that are so critical to the writing center community.

Beyond being used as a lens for analysis of how consultants are enculturated into the writing center community, communities of practice can provide a framework and language for how to make visible the importance of the everyday moments across the writing center and its many populations (consultants, administrators, writers, etc.). In *The Everyday Writing Center*, Geller et al. (2007) unpack and apply Wenger's community of practice to develop a learning-centric pedagogy specifically for teaching within the writing center's community of practice. In addition to illustrating the adaptability of communities of practice framework in pairing with several other theories (e.g. model of the trickster, temporality, theories of learning and reflective practice, and critical theories of race), Geller et al. (2007) weave together theoretical explanations and narratives of "life on the ground in the writing center [...in order to] make an effort to use the *hows* to illuminate the whys and the *whys* to illuminate the hows" (p. 9). In the data analysis chapter, I build on this characterization of the relationship between theory and practice within a community of practice and apply it to how consultants are thinking about and enacting their participation in the writing center. Communities of practice as a theory also allows for the investigation of how members grow and learn within the writing center community. Like Geller et al. (2007), I am interested in not only what consultants know, but how they learn, imagine, and grow within the writing center community. But, while their focus is on how consultants' everyday intersections create a shared repertoire, I am interested in how consultants' shared repertoire—constructed by both formal experiences like training and informal everyday moments—manifests itself during consultations in strategies depending on disciplinary expertise. Communities of practice, when applied to the site of the writing center, elucidates the relationship between learning and identity within the unique contexts of the spaces, principles, and practices of writing centers. Communities of practice describes that "education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of self" (Wenger, 1998 as quoted in Geller et al., 2007 p. 8). As my research illustrates, the combined experiences of consultant training and working with writers *does* open a new dimension of self—their consultant identity.

In addition to being a useful framework for illuminating the importance of interactions within the writing center, communities of practice can be applied to better understand the impact of the writing center community on the student writers who enter this space. Valentine (2008) investigates the potentials, perils, and possibilities of narrative for exploring the student identity of writers in the writing center. To do so, she employs Wenger's community of practice framework, focusing specifically on the modes of belonging—engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement is the ongoing process and practice of interactions and relationships. Imagination speaks to the way in which people construct themselves within a space and imagine new possibilities for themselves. Finally, alignment is about how much people adapt collective community ideologies and methods. While Valentine's (2008) study focuses on the student identity of writers who use the writing center, and my research on the disciplinary and consultant identity of writing center tutors, the site of the writing center is a common thread, because I too believe that "the writing center is a space where stories about learning, literacy and identity are told and re-told" (p. 63). Particularly, this study provides a model for how the modes of

belonging (engagement, imagination, and alignment), which are so critical to a community of practice, can be used as a framework for analyzing narratives— a valued practice in writing center studies. Identity negotiation within learning is often ignored in traditional concepts of education, but is at the core of what it means to be a person (Valentine, 2008) and, as I argue in this research, a disciplinary writer and a writing center consultant. Like Valentine (2008), I am interested in using communities of practice to understand how multimembership in communities can be in tension with each other, causing the construction and maintenance of an identity that is viable within and across those communities. However, while Valentine studies the online narratives of underrepresented students, interviewing them about their experiences in the writing center, I am applying this framework to understand how consultants reconcile their layered identity as a result of being a part of a community of practice both within the writing center and in their disciplines. I share Valentine's caution about narrative's tendency to reify identity, but my method of interviews combined with participant checks over the course of a year along with my questions that ask consultants about experiences throughout their academic journey seeks to mitigate the potential peril of a single snapshot. In the next section, I describe the methods that I used to collect and analyze data, through the lens of communities of practice. I also outline some key demographic information for my 7 participants and position myself within the writing center community.

Methods

Data Collection

I interviewed 7 undergraduate consultants at the Howe Writing Center. Combined, the 7 interviews total over 340 minutes of audio transcribed. Though consultants came from a variety of academic years and disciplinary backgrounds, they had all previously completed the consultant training course, meaning they were consulting full-time. All participants attend Miami University—a medium-sized, public, selective, midwestern 4-year institution.

To recruit participants, I sent an invitation to participate via email to the HWC consultant listserv. In the email was a link to a form where participants could read through and fill out the consent form. Participants had the option for an in-person or zoom interview.

The interviews were semi-structured and conversational/dialectic in nature following the principles of feminist interviewing (DeVault, 1990; DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hydén, 2014; Oakley, 2016). Interviews were grounded in the following questions but had room for follow-up questions and for new directions participants wanted to go with their responses:

Writing, Disciplinary, and Consulting Identities

- What is your year in school and what is your major(s) and/or minor(s)?
    - How do you think your major has influenced or not influenced how you write?
    - *If a participant is a double major/engaged in more than one discipline outside of the writing center: How, if at all, do you think being a double major has influenced how you think about writing in and out of consultations?

- How long have you been a consultant at the Writing Center? What made you want to become a consultant? What influence, if any, did your background experience/majors play in this decision?
- As part of your training to become a writing consultant, you read, discussed, and learned a lot about writing and writing center studies. Do you consider yourself to be a part of this discipline? Why or why not?
    - What are your values as a writing center consultant (ex. Founding principles, what motivates you, etc.)

Consultation Experiences

- Can you describe your experience having a consultation with a writer who has a similar major to you? What strategies/approaches did you use to work with the writer based on your shared disciplinary knowledge? What kinds of conversations about disciplinary writing expectations were you able to have with the writer?
- Can you describe your experience having a consultant with a writer who has a dissimilar major to you? What strategies/approaches did you use to work with the writers who have very different disciplinary expertise from you?

Navigating Disciplinarity

- What do you consider you consultant identity and how is that influenced, or not influenced, by your disciplinary expertise and experience?
- Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt it was difficult to navigate disciplines in the writing center either in a consultation, in training, during an event, etc.?

Training and Development

- When you reflect back on your training, were there any particular activities, readings etc. that were helpful to you in navigating disciplines in writing center consultations?
- One of the goals of this study is to come up with recommendations for ongoing consultant development (like seminars) for strategies and activities that can help consultants navigate the many disciplines they are engaged with and the different rules and expectations for writing embedded in them. What do you think would be helpful to provide you with support?

Participants

Below, this chart illustrates the participants and their relevant demographic/identity information, including their pronouns, academic year, disciplinary communities, and the number of semesters they have been consulting at the HWC[1].

[1] For the purposes of this study, the semesters consulting metric includes both the semester consultants complete the training course and begin consulting as well as the semester in which the interviews were conducted. Participants were interviewed in the first few weeks of the fall semester, thus, consultants would have been in the beginning of their nth semester.

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Academic Year	Majors and Minors	Semesters Consulting
Freddie	they/them	Sophomore	Double major in Russian, East European, & Eurasian Studies and Data Science & Statistics	2
Teddy	he/him	Senior	Double major in International Studies and Russian, East European, & Eurasian Studies	4
Astrid	she/her	Junior	Triple major in French, Linguistics, and French Education	4
Lovie	she/her	Senior	Double major in History and Integrated Social Studies Education	4
Kara	she/her	Senior	Major in Accounting; minor in Art & Architecture History	3
Allison	she/her	Junior	Major in Creative Writing; minors in Music Performance and Rhetoric & Writing	4
Eve	they/them	Senior	Double major in Professional Writing and Strategic Communication; Minor in Emerging Technology and Business Design	4

It is relevant to note that the distribution of majors represented by participants is not entirely a representative sample. At the time of this research, ~45% of all consultants (undergraduate and graduate) had at least one major in an English-related discipline[2] (e.g. Professional Writing, Literature, Creative Writing, and English Education). I make this distinction with the number of consultants in an English-related discipline because some writing centers are composed primarily or entirely of consultants from this disciplinary affiliation. As this research will show, disciplinary backgrounds shape writing conceptions and values. Thus, the disciplinary backgrounds of consultants impact the relative hegemony and diversity of perspectives on writing in the writing center. At the HWC, consultants are recruited from all disciplines but there exists a large draw from English-related disciplines. Of the participants in this study, ~30% fall into this category of having at least one English-related discipline whereas ~70%'s disciplinary

[2] These disciplines are being categorized as English-related because at Miami University, they are all housed within the English department or include significant coursework in the English department. However, this institutional structure may be different for other universities. Additionally, each of these majors have their own distinct disciplinary affiliations. These majors have been grouped together for the purpose of this analysis because this is, within the institutional context, the majors that consultants are thinking about as associated with English, broadly construed.

background is completely outside of English. Participation in this research was voluntary, and so consultants outside of what is often considered English as the traditional or assumed discipline of writing consultants might have been especially drawn to volunteer to participate.

Dinitz and Harrington (2014) call for "additional local studies [that] could shed light on the contextual factors affecting disciplinary expertise" (p. 95). Within the HWC, situated within the culture of Miami University, the contextual factor that may be contributing to consultants' increased disciplinary awareness (which this research will demonstrate) could be the presence of so many double and triple majors, a phenomenon that is very dramatic in the writing center. Of the 25 undergraduate writing consultants, 24 of them (96%) are involved in multiple academic disciplines (i.e. have a minor or double major). All 7 (100%) of participants in my research are involved in multiple disciplinary communities, whether that be through a combination of a major and minor(s), double, or even triple majoring. As such, consultants are bringing with them to the writing center community a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds.

Participants were consulted via member checks to ensure that they have a voice in how their stories are being represented.

Data Analysis

I analyzed my data using an iterative, inductive, descriptive coding scheme (Kekeya, 2016; Neale, 2016) that served the purpose of thematic analysis (Morgan & Nica, 2020). I followed the principles of grounded theory, deriving my theories and themes from my data, rather than imposing pre-generated categories for a more recursive, closely connected process (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). While I started with preliminary categories for my coding schemes, these themes evolved as I worked through the data, and so I revised the categories and descriptions to best fit the research and serve my analysis.

My revised coding categories and definitions are as follows:

- Values and Conceptions of Writing
    - What participants think about, how they do, and what they value about writing. In some cases, this is influenced by their disciplinary affiliations.
- Disciplinary affiliation/identification
    - When participants discuss how they feel about their experiences in their academic disciplines and/or the field of writing center studies and the extent to which their perceptions align with those disciplines. This category of coding also includes when participants felt instances of alignment and friction between their academic disciplines and their role as a consultant.
- Consultant identity
    - When participants directly identified what they thought of as their consulting identity, including the core principles (threshold concepts) that shaped that identity and their motivations for consulting. Indirectly, this theme appeared when they discussed consultation strategies that reflect and reinforce this identity.
- Disciplinary expertise and consulting strategies
    - When participants explain how their disciplinary expertise (from their academic disciplines and consulting training) impacts the strategies for and the ways in which they think about consulting. This category includes two subcategories:

Strategies for shared expertise/experience and Strategies for no shared disciplinary expertise/experience.

- Training/Ongoing development
    - When participants detail the elements of training that have been helpful in shaping their consulting identity, expertise, and strategies as well as what recommendations they have for training and ongoing development that can help consultants think about their disciplinary awareness and expertise and how that manifests in their consulting strategies.

In analyzing my data, I strive to follow Rubin and Rubin's (1995) principles of dwelling in the data to be able to hear participants and construct their stories with empathy and care. Though, I recognize that because of researcher bias and positioning, we all hear from a subjective position. Thus, in the next section, I issue a positionality statement, explaining as a researcher my relationship to the participants and community that I am studying and how I believe this informs and ultimately enriches my analysis.

Positionality Statement

It is imperative to recognize that I am not only studying the writing center's community of practice, but I myself am also a community member. Thus, I share much of the same domain of interest and repertoire as my participants, since I too, went through threshold concept-based training and have worked as a consultant within the context of that community. So while I am collecting only interview data, my enculturation into the community and status as an insider informs and enriches my analysis. What I believe to be most relevant to this research is my positioning within the writing center's network of relationships. I am currently one of the graduate assistant directors (GAs) of the writing center.

One of the main responsibilities of a GA is mentorship of consultants. Thus, my results—and my ongoing interpretation of these results—are shaped by my persistent personal and professional relationships with the consultants/participants. I am in Special Interest Groups with them; I am their mentor for group research projects; I chat with them in the lounge; I overhear their consultations from the desk I sit at 20 hours a week. There is, of course, an element of power in that relationship. While I do not wield any grading or hiring power, I am still influencing and developing programming, still a part of the administration. And yet, there are parts of my experience and identity that align closely with consultants and construct peer relationships. In fact, the interviews for this research actually played a role in this network, in some cases building on and in some cases facilitating these dual mentor/peer relationships. Ultimately, I want to recognize that I am an insider/member with a positionality that enables me to especially shape this community I am researching. In the next chapter, I turn to analyzing the interview data through the lens of communities of practice through both mini case studies of two participants and broader thematic analysis of key concepts.

Chapter 2: Data Analysis

In this chapter, I first introduce some key theories and principles that inform consultant training as well as some key features of consultants' ongoing professional development. This context

constructs the HWC as a community of practice. Thus, these experiences are vital in shaping consultants' personal history of participation and in foregrounding the consulting values that participants will later identify as key underpinnings of their consultant identity.

Next, I explore the themes of disciplinary writing and consultant identities through the lens of communities of practice in the form of two participant spotlights—Allison and Teddy. Through this analysis, I seek to address the question of how writing consultants' identities as writers and consultants are influenced by their academic disciplines and their writing center training.

Then, I analyze interview data across participants in a broad scope. I examine the impact of disciplinary expertise on consulting strategies, addressing the question of how writing center consultants conceptualize, adopt, acknowledge, and engage with disciplinary affiliations and expertise during consultations. Through the lens of communities of practice, I investigate what this tells us about consultant identity and participation. Finally, I zero in on how consultants are and are not self-identifying themselves with the discipline of writing studies. Ultimately, this chapter does a deep delve into participants' perceptions, stories, and values as disciplinary writers and writing center consultants.

HWC Community of Practice: Training & Development

Consultant Training & Writing Center Values

In order to understand the HWC as a community of practice, it is vital to know the values and practices that are taught in consultant training—which is the formalized induction into the shared domain, shared community, and shared practice of the writing center.

The purpose of the training course is to prepare trainees to be peer consultants; in other words, the course will prepare them to be practitioners in a community of consultants. But, the course also serves as an introduction to "writing studies and pedagogy [by] asking [consultants in training] to inquire into core writing principles and practices [... which] immerse[s] you in varied complex questions about how and why we write, and how we can learn to write more effectively for varied contexts"—questions that are central to writing studies and hugely applicable to writing center studies (Hutton 2021). The course introduces consultants in training to key writing center theories and practices through Fitzgerald and Ianetta's (2016) *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Essentially, the training course foregrounds collaboration, writer agency, and research-informed practices while prompting trainees to reflect on their own writing practice and values. Though they are being trained to be consultants, they are also being introduced to and prepared to participate in the subdiscipline of writing center studies[3].

[3] For the purposes of this research, I am conceptualizing writing center studies as a subdiscipline of writing studies, because it is applying threshold concepts, values, and practices to the context of writing centers and writing center literature. However, I recognize the tricky underpinnings to this line of thought and complications of how consultants are and we can think about writing centers in relation to disciplinary classifications are discussed more thoroughly at the end of this chapter.

The HWC constructs training around its set of interconnected, research-based principles, that are largely drawn from Adler-Kassner and Wardle's (2015) *Naming what we know: Threshold concepts of writing studies*. Threshold concept-based training emphasizes that reflecting on and integrating these threshold concepts into their practice—"as [both] consultants and writers—can deepen and complicate our understanding of these principles" (Hutton 2021). These threshold concepts/principles, enumerated on the consultant training course syllabus (Hutton 2021) are as follows:

1. Writing is social and rhetorical. Consultants should learn about the social and rhetorical contexts that shape the work that a writer is doing, and consultants should explicitly use this information to shape their consultations.
2. Writing is informed by prior experience, including cultural experiences and norms. Writers and consultants should be provided plentiful opportunities to consider how their prior experiences inform their understanding of and ability to fulfill specific writing and reading tasks.
3. All writers have more to learn, and all writers benefit from practice and revision. Writing consultants best enable writers' learning by encouraging writers to practice and to experiment with varied approaches to revision, suggesting new perspectives, processes, or technologies. Consultants themselves should also continue to practice and experiment with varied approaches to revision
4. All writers and readers are constantly negotiating language differences. Writers and consultants should recognize the linguistic diversity of all readers and writers, and they should work together to discuss and discern which language norms may be best suited for specific tasks, contexts, readers, and goals.
5. Reflection and metacognition are important parts of improving as a writer. Writers and consultants should be provided plentiful opportunities to reflect on their development, as writers, as readers, and as learners.
6. Writing is embodied cognition; it is emotional as well as cognitive and social. How writers feel about writing impacts how they write and what they are able to accomplish as writers. Writing consultants should not only support writers' intellectual work and development; they should also recognize and support the emotional work entailed in writing. Moreover, writing consultants themselves should recognize the emotional labor they perform as consultants, and they should be supported in this work as well.
7. Writing enacts values, conventions, and identities, including those of disciplines and professions. Writing consultants support writers best when they acknowledge the diversity of values, conventions, and identities that writers bring to their writing tasks. Writing consultants should recognize that each student has unique prior experiences, writing needs, learning styles, abilities, identities, and expectations, and work to support such a unique profile as best they can.

These principles form a latticework that is the foundation for consultant training at the HWC, informing not only their consulting practices but their conception of writing and their identity as a consultant. As will be demonstrated in the analysis of interview data, when consultants articulate their consulting identity they often draw connections to these principles verbatim and these threshold concepts influence their conceptualization of writing center studies as a subdiscipline.

The consultant training course assignments are designed to prompt consultants to reflect on their writing identity, develop their writing center expertise, and engender their learning via participation in the writing center community. Throughout this course, trainees read selected readings from the discipline of writing studies and complete low-stakes, frequent discussion posts. These readings and subsequent discussion and reflection invite consultants into relevant scholarly conversations in the field and develop the foundation of their writing center expertise. The first major assignment is a literacy narrative, which asks trainees to consider one influential part of their writing identity based on past experiences and explore how it impacts their present. Additionally, observations paired with written reflections are dispersed throughout the semester; thus, trainees can see consulting in practice at key times throughout their semester as they are developing the start of their own consultant identity. In addition to exposing trainees to various consulting strategies in practice, observations encourage network building and prompt trainees to become familiar with the physical space of the writing center. Toward the end of the course, trainees transition to practitioners as they begin consulting. New consultants continually complete written reflections, which at the end of the semester are compiled and synthesized. Finally, the culminating project of the training course is an inquiry project, in which consultants research a writing center challenge/question of their choice and produce a one-page resource to share with fellow consultants. In completing this inquiry project, consultants are indicating an issue within the writing center's domain of interest that they are passionate about and, in building their resource, they are contributing to the theory and practice of the writing center community.

Ongoing Professional Development

Partnership Projects

Each semester, consultants are placed in partnerships to work on small projects of writing center research. These groups are often created based on shared interests and include a mix of experienced and newer consultants. Partnership groups meet for an hour every other week for a total of six weeks during the semester. Each partnership is assigned a staff mentor who provides them support and guidance throughout the process of developing and completing their partnership project. The partnership protocols that consultants receive describe that "this project may lead to a conference presentation (at Miami or nationally), a resource for writers or consultants, workshops or other professional development for the HWC, or even an event you would like the HWC to host."

Partnerships are a large part of the writing center's community of practice. The research that consultants conduct together contributes to their shared domain of interests and expertise both within their group as they collaborate and within the writing center as a whole when they share their deliverables with the rest of the consultants. Partnerships also facilitate learning and participation through the network of member relationships—strengthening connections that already exist and enabling mentorship of newer consultants by more experienced consultants. Finally, partnerships embody the concept of community members as practitioners. Consultants are not only using theory-based strategies in their consultants; they are responsible for researching and developing them in partnerships. Through this scaffolded research, they are interacting with and responding to conversations in the field of writing center studies.

Consultant Seminars

Seminars embody the values of ongoing professional development and community-building that are central to the HWC community. Consultants attend six mandatory seminars a semester, after completing training. Seminars are a chance for consultants to reflect on their consulting practice and compare notes with other consultants in a large group setting and serve as a place to discuss any changes to HWC operations. Seminars are often designed to provide specific training in aspects of being a writing center consultant such as for certain genres (e.g. CVs and Resumes), disciplines (e.g. Business Writing), and types of writing (e.g. Group Writing and Multimodal Writing). Seminars, which are led by Graduate Assistant Directors, also address issues that consultants have identified as important to them by adapting applicable partnership projects into seminar presentations (e.g. “Navigating a Difference of Expertise and Genre Knowledge in Consultations” and “Managing Consultant Burnout and Wellbeing”). Seminars provide a place and space for the building of relationships and repertoire that are crucial in a community of practice.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) provide consultants with the opportunity to engage in writing-center related and approved research, programming, outreach, and/or resource design—all collaborative activities that strengthen their network of relationships and expand their participation in the community. Consultants have the option to join as many of the following SIGs as they would like to be involved in—Creative Writing SIG, Community SIG, Social Media SIG, and Book Club SIG.

Participant Spotlights

Allison—Tension and Synergy: The Work of Reconciliation with Strong Disciplinary Affiliations

Allison is a junior majoring in Creative Writing with minors in Musical Performance and Rhetoric and Writing. She has been very involved in the writing center for 4 semesters she has worked there. Allison’s conceptions of writing are heavily influenced by her participation in and identification with the discipline of creative writing. Allison sees writing as something individual and messy; writing has value because of its capacity for creative expression. Her creative writing courses have taught her to value experimentation through taking risks and following her passions and ideas. She describes that if, for example, she had been assigned to write a piece about the body, if she were inspired by another related topic and drifted off from the prompt, this wandering is not only acceptable but encouraged. Allison explained that because you are making the effort to practice and grow as a writer while expressing yourself the way that you want to, it still fulfills the objective of the assignment. Overall, Allison thinks that being a part of the creative writing discipline has helped her to see that for writing, "the boundaries are way wider than we expect them to be."

Likewise, her experience playing the cello for her music performance minor causes her to view the writing process in a new, more holistic light—one that takes into account tactile activities

such as "sitting and thinking" or "tossing a ball" as a valued writing activity just as much as the act of putting words onto a page. Music performance underscores the importance of experimentation in the creative process and the value of expression through different mediums.

As Allison has become more and more enculturated into the community of practice that is the discipline of creative writing, her negotiation between how she thinks of writing—including its characteristics and purpose—and how she thinks of herself as a writer based on her experiences, has constructed her writing identity. Coming from a perspective that has been heavily influenced by the values of creative writing, Allison feels strongly that creative expression and freedom to experiment are important parts of writing. But as a consultant, she works with writers in other disciplines, disciplines who do not share the same values and practices as creative writing. This, at times, causes friction between her disciplinary affiliations and conceptions of writing and her role and identity as a consultant which she described as follows:

> It's hard [because there are] certain things I feel I have to say—that if that's really what you want to say you should say it. But sometimes that's not what they're told to do. And if [their professors] see something that's really good, [but] that's not part of the prompt, they could still lose a lot of points [...] I think a lot of what I study day to day is creative expression. So helping people follow rubrics can be kind of frustrating.

Just as Allison is simultaneously a member of multiple communities of practice such as the writing center and her discipline of creative writing, she also has many facets to her identity—including her consultant and disciplinary writing identity. However, the framework of communities of practice explains that to understand how membership in one community of practice influences another, we must look at the nuances of how those many facets of one's identity are reconciled into a single identity that supports one's multimembership. In this scenario, Allison is put into a situation where she is forced to manage the competing demands from her communities of practice and their impact on her identity. In other words, her disciplinary writing identity calls for one response (i.e. you should write what feels authentic and meaningful to you) versus what her position as a consultant calls her to do (i.e. you should balance the expectations of the writer, their professor, and their discipline) causes tension. Allison's strategy for dissipating this tension is to "give them both options and let them choose," though she lamented that she "wish[ed] I could give them a better answer." Here, Allison, in a strategized effort to negotiate between her two identities, engages in the "work of reconciliation" which Wenger (1998) characterizes as "the most significant faced by learners who move from one community of practice to another" as they have to manage competing demands from their multimembership in different communities of practice (p.160).

Wenger explains that the "process of reconciliation leads to successful resolutions or is a constant struggle" (p. 160). With this example from Allison, I propose a third option—an uneasy truce. Allison has found a resolution—a consulting strategy that she uses routinely, but that tension has not been entirely mitigated and she would be open to other strategies if they presented themselves. But, even though her status as a member of multiple communities informs her view of writing, she consults in the space of the writing center, and so the practices and repertoire of that writing center community are most pressing. In this instance, her accountability is to the writing center and to the writer, which informs her response and the sense of

responsibility that she feels to help them in a way that doesn't go against her writing values, even if it doesn't align with them.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity for the work of reconciliation to promote the integration of these facets of identity to create harmony across the contexts in which she writes and helps others write. When asked about her consultant identity, Allison took the initiative to draw connections across the key values that she had learned and internalized as part of her writing center training and her experiences in creative writing:

> I definitely bring the writing is not natural and also that everybody can be a writer [to my work as a consultant]. A lot of that actually was…being creative writing major because you get to a point [...], especially in college, in creative writing, where everybody has already passed the level of being high-level writers. And so what you look at is the differences and their style and the differences of their art and how they express themselves. And that's so cool. So I think seeing that and being in that mindset and then coming to work at the Howe, I know everybody can read or be at any level that determines good writing. And I guess the best part of it is that they're all going to look completely different.

Even as Allison weaves together the different contexts of multimembership in which her writing identity exists and demonstrates its large impact on her experiences, identity is never permanent, no matter its significance or widespread application. So while in many ways she views writing as contextual, its effectiveness determined by its purpose and effect in a particular situation, when describing the members of her major as all "high-level writers" there is a value of writing as a general skill and being a high-level writer as an operative identity. Thus, to understand identity as a layered, ever-changing phenomenon is to recognize that a person's conceptions of writing in relation to identity are also always being negotiated and renegotiated, influenced by a personal history of participation and future trajectories. This dual and seemingly contradictory conception of writing is not uncommon. When we are exposed to new experiences that challenge our old conceptions to form new ones, these can exist simultaneously. Hawkins and Edwards (2015) describe that "the concept of liminality (Turner, 1969, 1979, 1987) can articulate undergraduate students' positions of 'being on a threshold' between one identity and another as they develop new and transformative understandings" (p. 25). Allison is still being influenced by the values of creative writing, which as a discipline has an investment in the idea of individual talent and originality at the same time that she believes and enacts the idea that everyone can be a good writer through her consulting strategies.

Additionally, Allison integrated these values of writing (writing is not natural and everyone can be a writer) into her ideas about writing across disciplinary and even outside of academic contexts. Allison was (at least officially) introduced to the threshold concept of writing is not natural first as part of her training to become a consultant. Because she resonated so strongly with how the domain of interest of the writing studies discipline, particularly how that discipline talked about, viewed, and researched writing, she added her second minor in Rhetoric and Writing. Through this, Allison is seeking out ways to participate and learn more from/in the discipline as a community of practice, building on her shared repertoire of writing centers which overlaps in many ways with writing studies. These courses have worked to reaffirm and strengthen the writing values that she first formed as a consultant in the community of the

college writing center. Now, working at a Literacy Center in Dayton, which serves populations of all education, age, and background, she explains how the fact that writing is a technology rather than a natural process drives her work at the writing center, literacy center, and rhetoric courses: “It's the technology that we build and skills that we use and not something that everybody can just do [...but…] I also know, practically, how important reading and writing are, not just to college. You’ve got to read street signs. You’ve got to stand up for yourself in court. So, knowing that it has a purpose [consulting on writing and reading] is something I like to do. I get to talk about this with someone and I get to help them. Even if this paper is not going to be their entire world.” Rather than conceptualizing the values of writing only in the contexts that she learned them, Allison is integrating the influences from multiple communities of practice into one cohesive identity that coalesces around the motivation to talk about and help others with writing. For example, instead of only thinking about the threshold concept of writing is not natural in the context of being a consultant, she applies it to both her disciplinary practices and to her job at the literacy center. Though in this research I am pulling out and examining the individual threads of disciplinary identity, consultant identity, conceptions of writing, etc., but they all exist within the same person—one who is simultaneously a writer, student, consultant, discipline member and so much more.

Identity in practice as something that is negotiated and renegotiated aligns with the idea that threshold concepts push learners into liminal spaces of uncertainty but with opportunities for learning. So it is not simply that learning some core theories of writing studies (i.e. that all writing is social and rhetorical) causes consultants to think of themselves differently as writers. It is the ongoing act of reading about, witnessing in action, experiencing, rethinking, and at times, pushing back against the threshold concept that impacts and ultimately works to cement their writer identity.

In Allison’s case, this happened with the idea that writing is not natural. Allison described that she “[doesn’t] know if it started here [at the writing center] or if it started in my rhetoric classes but I have been working in a literacy center in Dayton and reading about how we learned to read and write [which] emphasized the idea that writing was not natural and how we have to [make] new neural pathways to learn to read and write because it’s not built into our brain. So that is super cool. And it also helps me understand when I enter the writing center that it's the technology that we build and skills that we use and not something that everybody can just do.” Thus, my purpose here is not to trace the exact trajectories of the development of these writing values in relation to disciplinary experiences, but rather to begin to understand how consultants might occupy a unique position in which they must balance and negotiate how they think about and help others write.

Ultimately, Allison is an example of someone with a strong disciplinary affiliation to her academic majors and minors. This can at times cause her to feel tension as a consultant because she recognizes the stakes in advising writers in accordance with their assignment’s disciplinary writing expectations rather than her own writing values, even though her strong identification with creative writing and its values is what motivated her to become a consultant in the first place. Then as a consultant, she sought out opportunities throughout the training, by conducting writing center research and by adopting a rhetoric and writing minor, to become further immersed in a discipline whose writing values resonated so deeply with the conceptions of writing that she already had. Though these writing values appear deeply ingrained in how they

are applied and balanced across different institutional contexts, identity is in constant renegotiation. Allison demonstrates that as a member of multiple communities of practice, the work of reconciliation is a vital component of how she conceptualizes and practices writing. Her ongoing reconciliation also enables her to manage competing demands and employ consulting strategies that allow her to do the work of consulting within the writing center without betraying the writing values she has adopted as a result of her engagement in her disciplinary communities of practice.

Teddy—Identity and Participation: Constructing a Repertoire of Practice

Teddy is a senior double majoring in International Studies (ITS) and Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies. He has worked at the Howe Writing Center first as a member of the support staff for 3 semesters and then as a consultant for the past 4 semesters. Before college, Teddy worked for two years in his high school writing center.

Teddy self-identified his approach to writing as utilitarian, valuing it as a method of effective communication. He described that:

> I think about writing primarily in a utilitarian way. It's a means to an end. This is coming from someone who is a fan of writing. I believe in writing because it's the most efficient and effective way we have of setting down ideas and communicating over long distances and periods of time. But if tomorrow you said to me 'I've got some magic, a better way, where I can give you all the benefits of writing, but none of the downsides' I would dump writing.

Essentially, Teddy values writing for what it does in a practical, communicative manner. He identified that he believed this was a "shared view [of writing]" with the students and professors in both of his majors. And, though it is a small distinction, he characterizes himself as someone who is "a fan of writing", but not necessarily as a writer, the way so many other of the participants do. Teddy possessed a sharp awareness of how "thinking of writing as something that's [not] useful on its own" puts him "out of step with a lot of other people who are English majors in the writing center." In other words, within the writing center as a community of practice, Teddy is part of the network of relationships that creates the community and has the shared experience and repertoire that makes him a member. However, Teddy places himself and his view of writing as somewhat at odds with—or at least not congruent with—other members of the community, particularly those consultants that come from English disciplinary backgrounds.

Here, Teddy demonstrates the negotiability of a repertoire within the community of practice by defining his identity in relation to the community. For example, Teddy thinks of his identity within the writing center (as a consultant who thinks about writing practically and as a means to an end) in relation to others (like Allison, who as a consultant and writer loves writing for writing's sake and might think of writing as an art with benefits outside of its communicative purpose). But, this *does not* negate his participation in the writing center as a community of practice. Rather, it adds to the argument that for consultants, the writing center functions as a community of practice that allows for multimembership and values different perspectives and backgrounds. Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2015) argue that differences in opinion and diversity of perspectives within the shared domain of interest and repertoire of knowledge are

essential to a community of practice. Discussion of differences promotes learning, and too much harmony in thinking may indicate groupthink or that voices are being silenced. In fact, "[d]isagreement, challenges and competition can all be forms of participation" (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Geller et al., 2007, p.7). This is part of the reason why the HWC is so determined to recruit and train consultants from all disciplinary backgrounds and have discussions during training and ongoing development that allow for varied strategies and aims—because unique perspectives enrich the community.

Indeed, Teddy defined his view of writing in relation to the discipline of English (from which many consultants hail) even when discussing contexts outside of the writing center. When discussing his experiences writing in his disciplines, Teddy described, from his and other anecdotal experiences, that ITS and Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies share many similarities and values, including that they are "not writing majors, but they are majors that do as much or more writing as an English major." Additionally, Teddy draws a comparison between his disciplines and some of the practices of creative writing when describing the type of writing he completes based on how his disciplines value writing:

> [When you are writing], you just do it. You do it as quickly as possible. You have a formula. [...] There's a lot of really complex research involved [so] it's very intensive. But in terms of the writing itself, there's no genre-bending like you would do in fiction where you're challenging the reader. [Instead,] you're always direct and simple. [...] if there is any sentence in a piece of writing that there is confusion about, that can be taken multiple ways, that's an active downside [in my discipline].

Here, Teddy is demonstrating that his values and practices of writing align with that of his discipline. His learning via participation, the network of relationships formed, and the shared set of skills and perspectives that he has gained through engagement with the discipline (classes, extracurriculars, independent research, etc.) over the past three years have deeply shaped his conception of writing and its purpose. Even when describing the immense workload of take-home exams, or the ambiguity of white paper prompts, Teddy feels that through his majors he gets to do the "best kind of writing [where] there's no time to think about any of that small stuff because it's all procedural, it's all big picture. You don't really worry about how long [your] sentences are because it's not relevant." So for the disciplines that encompass his two majors of International Studies and Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies, he is both a member of the community of practice and strongly self-identifies as a member.

But, as we know from Wenger (1998) you do not have to self-identify as a member to be a part of the community of practice. This is the case for Teddy and the writing center. When asked if he considered himself to be a part of the discipline of writing center studies, Teddy quickly replied with a resolute "no." When Teddy elaborated, his response revealed a divide between what he conceptualized as different forms of participation—theory and practice. Because even though Teddy, like all consultants, is doing directed research within the HWC through semester-long partnership projects, and has even presented at a writing center conference in high school, he maintained that "I'm someone who likes research, but I wouldn't say that I'm doing writing center work from a theoretical perspective." For Teddy, his concept of participating in a discipline is doing theoretically informed research, and while he certainly sees himself as participating in the community of the writing center, this participation looks different than it does in his discipline.

But, this might have much more to do with Teddy's identity as a consultant than it has to do with him potentially not having the same domain of interest as the community. Indeed, if the HWC's domain of interest casts a wide net of topics from the nature of the writing center, threshold concept informed principles, and the merits and drawbacks of specific consulting strategies, Teddy certainly falls within that scope but is especially interested in one piece over the rest—that piece is being a *peer* consultant and working with writers.

Teddy explained that contributing to the theoretical knowledge of writing centers is "not what interested me in writing center work. I like working with students. I like consulting. I like putting in the hours [and] talking to students. That's why I do the job." For Teddy, this crucial part of his consultant identity—the focus above all else of working with and serving the writers—informs and is informed by two things: his conception of writing as utilitarian which comes from his experience writing in his disciplines, and his preference for—specifically in the domain of writing centers—what he is thinking about as practice over theory. This affects both how he engages with the writing center as a community of practice and the strategies he employs in consultations regardless of the writer's disciplinary affiliation.

To Teddy, being a writing consultant and serving as a peer for the writers is more than a job, evidenced by the fact that he admitted being a consultant is so much a part of his identity that he would "do this [even] if they didn't pay me." How he participates in the writing center's community of practice is heavily influenced by and in turn, influences his consultant identity. His writer-focused perspective causes him to think about his development as a consultant in a certain light. Teddy explained that "I am very student-focused, whatever I think is going to be best for the student[4], we're going to do that. And as a result of that, in a lot of seminars I try to participate [and] I'm very active in seminars, but really what I'm thinking almost 90% of the time is 'all right, I've got to sit down with a student tomorrow is a consultation. Is any of this good? What am I going to do?'"

In elaborating on what he means, Teddy draws on a Jewish parable[5] to explain how he views the divide between practice and theory, and why this is so important for his identity and the work he does as a consultant:

> It's another case of a lot of time in seminars, I always feel like I'm the…There's an old Jewish parable [where] there are all these mice in this house and the cat is preying on them. And they're all terrified of the cat because they can never tell when it's going to sneak up on them. And so one day, all the mice get together and one of the young mice says, 'I have an idea. We should put a bell on a cat. And that way, whenever he comes near us, we'll hear it, and that way we can get away.' And all the mice are talking about

[4] Interestingly, in this quote Teddy uses the word "student" to describe the writer, when "writer" is the vocabulary that consultants and administrators typically use. While his choice of words could potentially be seen as in tension with the community of practice, I read it as most likely an extension of the way he thinks about himself and emphasizes his role as a peer. In this scenario, Teddy is not thinking of himself as a teacher and the writer as a student. Instead, because he is a student and can understand other students, he is foregrounding his role as a peer in helping the writer.

[5] The focus of this research was on other disciplinary communities of practice, not cultural ones, and yet with this example we see how Teddy—who identifies as Jewish— is pulling in knowledge from multiple communities of practice, all of which affect how he sees learning and participation and all of which contribute to the negotiation and renegotiation of his identity.

> how it is a brilliant idea, how this is going to fix everything. And then finally, one of the older mice stands up and he says, 'great idea, but which one of you is going to put the bell on the cat?' It's basically saying, it's a great idea, but it ain't going to work. Or it's a great idea, but, well, we don't have the power to make it happen.
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> So that's something where I think [...] I don't know if I'm out of step with the other a lot of other consultants, but it is one small place where I think I'm out of step with the administration. I'm sort of blissfully unconcerned with theory and all these sorts of [these] arcane things that I don't really like and I don't really spend a lot of time trying to understand. I just want to get in front of a student and have that interaction and help them in that micro sense. And thank goodness, frankly, there are people who are thinking about the big picture because that really is how things get better. But for me, I just don't really see it, I guess. Or at least for me, I guess my brain doesn't work that way. It's all nuts and bolts.

This tale personifies that there is a "[gap] between knowing *what* to do and *how* to do it" (Launspach, 2008, p. 57). In other words, the mice have the declarative knowledge of what needs to happen (putting the bell on the cat) without the procedural knowledge of how to make that happen (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988). Teddy values procedural knowledge. Or perhaps it is better put that his valuing of declarative knowledge is contingent on having procedural knowledge to accompany it. In other words, from Teddy's point of view, theory needs to be closely tied to practice to be useful for how he participates in the writing center's community of practice.

In a member check, Teddy clarified how his view of writing center theory is influenced by how he sees his role in the larger ecosystem of the writing center. Teddy wrote that:

> When I say I am 'out of step' with the administration, my point is that, as a consultant, I place myself downstream from the ongoing production of theory. In other words, I am a grunt—and my job is to be told what to do and then do it the best I can. Because of this, generally my priority is not 'what should be done' but 'how can it be done.' I would also highlight that I am able to hold this view because I wholeheartedly trust that the people producing theory are working to the benefit of students, and I can therefore remove myself from that part of the conversation and focus on implementation, a place where I am more comfortable. Obviously this is a constructed identity, and one that I am sure many consultants do not share. However, I personally find it to be useful. I think it simplifies my role as a consultant in a way that makes me, and therefore students, more comfortable and confident.

This quote further illuminates how Teddy sees his identity as a consultant positioned as a mix between student and worker. Then, through the lens of his own identity, Teddy is elaborating on what he sees as the role and expertise of a consultant, in relation to the rest of the community (e.g., the roles and expertise of administrators) and how practice and theory figure into those different roles, toward the same central goal of benefitting the writers the community serves. I find this idea of being "downstream" from theory production really interesting in understanding how Teddy is conceptualizing the relationship between theory and practice in the writing center. Rather than placing theory and practice in separate boxes, the idea of downstream illustrates that

some consultants, while they may not see themselves as producers of theory, are applying, adapting, and benefiting from theory in their practice.

Regardless of an argument that I might make about how theory informs Teddy's practice, I think the interesting thing here is that he is personally uninterested in engaging in that aspect of the community of practice[6]. He has, as he characterized it, "a very distinct and sometimes inflexible point of view" but this strong point of view creates an identity that acts as the throughline to many communities of practice. So, unlike Allison who engages in the reconciliation of two aspects of her identity because of the tension that the different values and roles cause, Teddy's membership in the different communities of practice co-exist harmoniously under the umbrella of valuing a practical approach to writing and consulting on writing, which is exemplified in the fable of the mice.

While Teddy's identity as a utilitarian writer and a peer consultant who values practice and service to the writer is enduring, it is still being constantly negotiated—even if that negotiation results in a stronger identification with his existing conceptions of himself as a writer and consultant. This negotiation and affirmation is present in Teddy's characterization of his consulting strategies and how they persist across disciplinary boundaries.

When Teddy was asked about how a writer's discipline in relation to his own disciplinary expertise impacted his consulting strategies, Teddy explained that he didn't think that shared disciplinary expertise (or lack thereof) was the driving force behind shaping his consulting strategies because the basic structure remains the same:

> Every consultation begins the same way. You sit down, you talk to the writer for a minute or two. Just basic facts. How was your day? How are you doing? And then you ask the same question in a million different ways, which is, so what's the problem? And every consultation goes the exact same way, which is that we try and solve that problem and any other problems that we might find out along the way. And in that meta-structure, it is the same.

I followed up by asking about differences in genre familiarity. Teddy's explanation reflects that while recognizing differences in genres, the purpose of the consultation remains the same—"I don't think that a consultation with a resume is fundamentally different from a lab report. In both cases, you're just trying to serve the writer. It's just trying to help them and help make their work better, help make them be more confident, help them just get out in the world [to...] feel and be a competent communicator." Once again, Teddy's strong sense of his identity as a consultant and the purpose that is attached to that identity presents itself as both a driving and unifying force. In this sense, I believe that Teddy has a strong sense of his "personal history of participation" and the way that these experiences are both influenced by and construct his repertoire of practice within the writing center (Wenger, 1998 p. 153). Understanding the metastructure of a

[6] Teddy is making this stark distinction between theory and practice. In the consultant training course, (which is, in fact, titled "Writing Center Consulting: Theory and Practice") theory and practice are framed as distinct but related concepts that are mutually influenced by the other. But, they are, according to communities of practice, in many ways synonymous. Because both theory and practice are critical to a shared repertoire, the theory of communities of practice indicates that the "dichotomy between the practice and the theoretical, ideals and reality, or talking and doing" breaks down (Wenger, 1998, p. 48)

consultation is a strategy developed for the recurring situation of consulting and the negotiation of his purpose of helping the writer.

Overall, Teddy—like Allison—is a writer with very strong disciplinary affiliations that influence how he values and conceptualizes writing. However, unlike Allison, the identity negotiated as a result of the disciplinary conceptions of writing directed his focus within the writing center's domain of interest. Then, his personal history of participation as a consultant led to the formation and ongoing negotiation of a consulting identity that aligned with and reinforced his disciplinary writing identity—all the while becoming a driving motivation in its own right. Teddy demonstrated an incredibly strong identification with the writing center community and his identity as a consultant, but in equal intensity does not consider himself to be a part of writing center studies as a discipline. Teddy's case study brings to light the ways in which participation in a community of practice is driven by identity—and, the ways in which participation in turn constructs a personal history of participation, which is integrated into that identity.

Disciplinary Expertise: Application for Consulting & Training

Thus far, the case studies of Allison and Teddy have demonstrated that a communities of practice framework allows for the recognition of the multiple and interlocking dimensions of identity that consultants have as writing center practitioners. Allison exemplifies the process of reconciliation that happens when these identities are in tension. Teddy's closely tied conceptions of identity and writing values elucidate the connection between identity and practice. Building on this analysis of how communities of practice facilitate the construction and negotiation of their identities, this section turns to the question of how consultants' disciplinary expertise—shaped by participants disciplinary identities and values of writing—is leveraged and applied in the context of the writing center. In other words, here I focus on how expertise and perspectives gained in one community of practice (a consultants' discipline) is repurposed to another community of practice (the writing center). Though the content of the disciplinary expertise may not be completely transformed in the writing center, the purpose and application of disciplinary knowledge are shaped by the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of consulting. Therefore, in the writing center, consultants' disciplinary identity (and the expertise that shapes that identity) are accountable to a different enterprise than the one in which it was formed. This accountability to the mission and expectations of the writing center calls for consultants to take certain actions and make specific decisions which result in the ongoing renegotiation of identity. Allison at times having to sideline her own values of writing to help a writer with their assignment during a consultation is an example of how her accountability to the mission of the writing center causes her to make certain decisions that she might not make in another community of practice. These converging factors—disciplinary expertise and accountability to the writing center community—inform the strategies that consultants use for writers in and out of their disciplines.

When consultants claim disciplinary expertise in the field of the piece of writing that a consultation centers around, it opens up additional avenues for experiences to draw from and inform feedback and ways to build rapport with the writer. That is not to say that these are not strategies that consultants deploy in every consultation, regardless of discipline. Rather, being in the same discipline as the piece of writing they are consulting on allows the opportunity for

consultants to draw on their disciplinary expertise as a member of that discipline, in addition to their writing expertise as a consultant.

The majority of responses from interview participants centered around how possessing disciplinary expertise shapes the feedback the consultants give. Participants described drawing on expertise gleaned from classes in the discipline and internships/work experiences, as well as emulating feedback that they have received from professors. Sometimes consultants identify these sources of knowledge as distinct (e.g. when they took the same class as the writer) or sometimes they are drawing on them as a conglomerate of experiences that form their disciplinary expertise. This expertise is formed as a result of the network of relationships in their disciplinary communities of practice that is built across joint activities, collaborative discussions, and key experiences that facilitate learning. For example, Kara—a senior accounting major in the business school—was working with a writer on a portfolio of emails, which the conventions and values of business writing dictate should be concise above all else. Kara described how her internships in finance and accounting gave her "those real-world examples to put yourself in the shoes of a manager or [a] professor" that helped her to convey *why* it matters in that discipline for emails to get straight to the point and be concise. Then, to help the writer achieve this goal, Kara draws heavily from a business communication course she took, emulating feedback that she received from that professor, whom she greatly respects and identifies with.

There are affordances that specialist knowledge and shared disciplinary expertise with the writer enable (Dinitz & Harrington 2014). These affordances may be particularly visible when writers are using their disciplinary expertise to inform feedback in a modality where communication is asynchronous, such as a written online consultation (WOL). Here, writers submit their piece of writing and answer a series of questions about the assignment and what feedback they are looking for. When giving feedback, consultants can't ask the writer questions in real-time as they can in Face-to-Face or Live Online consultations. They are limited to the information that the writer has supplied ahead of time. But, disciplinary expertise can fill in the gaps to some of the questions a consultant might ask, and even allow them to ask more specific questions. Eve is a senior double major in Professional Writing and Strategic Communications with a minor in Emerging Technology in Business + Design (ETBD). They described that the combined experiences of their majors and minor, all of which share an overlap in courses and in disciplinary values of writing, "complement each other well and challenge me to think—really think—about differences in audience and in genre across writing tasks." Therefore, Eve possesses disciplinary expertise in composing across genres and analyzing writing rhetorically. This comes to light when they describe a WOL consultation they had for an ENG 111 (First Year Composition) rhetorical analysis. In this consultation, they were able to use their disciplinary expertise—combined with their consulting experience after years of working at the writing center which meant they were familiar with the assignment and its parameters—to ask prompting questions that guided the reader. For example, they were able to ask about a rhetorical appeal that the writer hadn't considered yet in the draft and give some explanation of why they thought it might be a good fit, given the writer's object of analysis. In this case, Eve was able to negotiate and combine expertise from two communities of practice to put this strategy into action to its full potential.

However, consultants always have access to the avenues for feedback that are available to them because of their expertise in writing that is gained through their training as a writing center consultant and their own experiences as a writer. When doing a consultation where they had very little content knowledge about the subject, participants described the strategies of focusing their feedback on the aspects of writing that are always present and important such as organization, argument, evidence, etc., and approaching the text as a reader. This demonstrates that in the absence of disciplinary expertise on the content of the writing, participants are drawing on their expertise that comes from being a consultant.

For example, Eve—even as a senior who had a ton of experience in writing centers and writing in their disciplines— described their experience consulting WOL the previous semester and feeling "heart palpitations" at the thought of doing a consultation with highly specialized content. That fear is compounded by the fact that these are often high-stakes assignments from graduate students (e.g. writing their dissertation or personal statements). However, throughout the semester, their consulting expertise was re-affirmed as they did those consultations and found that they had plenty of things to say, even if they were "just a punk English major who doesn't really know anything about [the topic]." Eve explained that:

> Even at [a graduate] level, there is still more that [the writer] could improve on. So I was always surprised by the fact that I was able to identify specific feedback [such as] helping with transitions or even asking questions. I think it's helpful to—instead of saying this looks wrong—[ask] a question: What do you mean by this? Or based on my reading of the text, it seems like this could be interpreted this way, which could be inane or could be completely far off. And that would signal to [the writer]—oh, maybe I need to clarify. At that level, they're using language I wasn't familiar with [and] I was trying to not get bogged down by that and instead, focus on what I know, which is clarifying arguments, organization, and of course, the basic grammar stuff. So I would say the advice that I keep in mind if I have something crazy that I just don't get is: don't psych myself out. [...] And to remind myself that I am equipped with the writing and writing center expertise to identify feedback for this task even when it seems really daunting[7].

Through the strategies of approaching the text as a reader, Eve drew on their writing center expertise. Here, we see that while a lack of subject matter expertise might restrict the types of actionable feedback a consultant can give, their positionality as an outsider to that discipline can enable open-question feedback and promote writer agency and expertise.

[7] Research indicates that consultants' confidence impacts the effectiveness of a consultation (Soliday, 2005) and influences the focus of the consultation (Dinitz & Harrington, 2014). This reveals the affective dimension of how disciplinary expertise impacts consulting strategies. But, this expertise would vary from institution to institution depending on the model and focus of tutor training, and from consultant to consultant, depending on what areas of writing expertise each individual consultant felt most confident with. Dinitz and Harrington (2014) found that their consultants did not identify and provide feedback on global issues when they were not confident in consultations where they lacked disciplinary expertise. But here, Eve indicates the global concerns of argument and organization in addition to grammar. Thus, the expertise and strategies that consultants develop and feel confident in will vary depending on contextual factors, including their experiences with tutor training and in their disciplinary communities.

And, a lack of disciplinary knowledge doesn't stop consultants from being able to attempt to place themselves in the role of someone who does share that disciplinary expertise. Astrid—a junior triple majoring in French, Linguistics, & French Education—discussed a consultation with a graduate student working on his master's thesis in statistics. Faced with the daunting task of consulting on a high-stakes, graduate-level piece of writing in a discipline she knew almost nothing about, Astrid started to panic. But recalling proposed strategies from training, she began to ask the writer theoretical questions— "If I was somebody in this field and I read this, would I understand this?"—all throughout the consultation. The writer affirmed that it was a helpful process—that even though they didn't change many words, thinking about those questions prompted a new perspective. Astrid's approach to asking the writer questions from a theoretical positionality provides evidence for Gordan's (2014) assertion that a consultant "can simulate a variety of discourse communities for students in order to educate them about their own positions in those communities and the ways in which they can exercise agency within them" (p. 2). In this example, Astrid's consulting strategies exemplify the kinds of meta-knowledge about disciplinarity, which I posit is a characteristic of consultant expertise. Astrid's meta-knowledge about disciplinarity manifests in her strategy, which recognizes the differences in and simulates disciplinary discourse and prompts the writer to think about disciplinary expectations and conventions.

One of the things that disciplinary expertise seems to affect, rather than the meta structure or outcome of consultation itself, is the consultants' confidence—especially, participants identified, when they first started consulting. Many of the participants described using the strategies of looking up handouts on genres and disciplinary writing as something that they "used to do" but something that has become less necessary over time as they gained more consulting experience and writing expertise.

The consultant training course features discussions on disciplinary writing and promotes an awareness of how a discipline's values construct the expectations and conventions of a genre of writing within that discipline. This is why, in addition to being able to ask questions as if they were in the same discipline as a writer, consultants have an understanding of what information about genre and discipline they want before a consultation and how to seek that information out. Because Astrid felt that she "need[s] to know the conventions" of a writing assignment when consulting, she "use[s] our writing center website" to look at the compiled resources and examples of different genres. She also described googling specific questions based on the appointment form. Interestingly, one place Astrid turned for information about genres and disciplines was her friends in different programs: "I remember my first time [consulting on] a lab report I really [didn't] even know how to write a report like that. So I sat down with some of my science friends and we walked through one of their lab reports. [...] I think it's just nice to know to have that broad education in general." Consultants across the board described that the strategy of seeking out resources was what they did when it was the first time they encountered a genre or discipline and that they were much more likely to use this strategy in the first few semesters of consulting. This awareness of knowing when and why they sought out resources demonstrates the theoretical knowledge they possess that writing is contextual and specific to disciplines.

Lovie articulated the strategy of soliciting genre and disciplinary-specific information from the writer at the beginning of a consultation. Thus, she is gathering more specific disciplinary

expectations and conventions from the writer, rather than searching for that information through other avenues, as Astrid described above. Lovie starts the consultation off by asking the writer questions so that she can gain a "general understanding of what this project is in layman's terms." Although, Lovie elaborated to say that "especially in some cases, I don't really need to understand what they're talking about to help them with their writing. But [because I ask the writer to explain their assignment in the beginning,] I still have a general overview. So even if I'm missing like every 10th word, that 11th word helps to form the story[8]." Lovie also emphasized that her strategy is to be as open and honest with the writer about what she knows as possible. Here, Lovie embodies what Savini (2011) identifies as "transparency", which, she argues, means the necessary communication of a consultants "lack of expertise" on a particular genre or discipline, which can then facilitate discussion between consultant and writer (p. 3). Lovie cushions and cautions her advice in a way that attends to disciplinary expectations of writing— "I am a very much a person who [says], 'I don't know what your professor or what discipline prefers, [...] my advice based on what I've experienced. If you're really worried about it, ask your professor.'" This awareness of the way that disciplinary perspectives shape writing tasks, and the way that she attends to this and makes it explicit for the writer, demonstrates how consultant expertise can take center stage in the absence of disciplinary expertise. Additionally, not knowing a lot about the writer's discipline allows consultants to take an interest by asking questions not only about the writing but about the discipline itself. This dynamic places the writer as the disciplinary expert and the consultant in a more "non-directive role" (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 148).

All of this is not to say, however, that disciplinary expertise is the only or even most prominent factor in shaping a consultation. In fact, when asked about strategies for writers with and without shared disciplinary expertise, Teddy promptly responded that for him, "there's no different strategy" as a consultant in how he approached the consultation, gave feedback, etc. He did go on, however, to identify a different driving force to a consultation: writer-consultant rapport. Teddy conceptualized that "the biggest effect [on how a consultation goes] is camaraderie." And, in explaining how camaraderie shapes a consultation, Teddy tapped into an incredibly important element of why shared disciplinary backgrounds and expertise impact a consultant—because they foster a sense of shared community. Teddy explained that "I think the big things about majors that is overlooked—you know, they talk a lot about writing styles but for me, it is really about *community*. You're both ITS students. You are the same. You have something in common. And so, as a consultant, I can kind of tap into that to draw out enthusiasm."

Interestingly, though it may have not been as explicitly stated, many of the other participants discussed how a shared background in a discipline helps them to establish, in some cases instantly, a rapport with the writer because of that shared community. The shared disciplinary community, in addition to enabling them to give feedback that is more tuned to the expectations and values of that particular discipline, provides consultants with a clear path to establishing trust and camaraderie. For example, Kara works for one of the writing center's satellite locations that

[8] In accepting that there are pieces that she will not—and doesn't have to—understand— Lovie is both relying on her expertise as a consultant by placing herself in the role of reader, while maintaining an attitude of flexibility that allows her not to get tripped up or bogged down by words she doesn't know. Her quote reflects what Summers (2016) coins as a "sci-fi strategy" after one of her participants likened consulting on graduate-level writing in the science disciplines to reading science fiction in that you have to accept there are things that you will not understand.

is embedded in the Business school and specializes in working with those genres and servicing those writers. As a member of the business community herself as an accounting major, she is able to establish immediate trust with the writers that she works with because "even though [consultant training] is pretty extensive and we are trained in how to approach writing of all kinds [...] I've had years worth of classes specifically tailored toward business writing." At first, Kara spoke about the affordances of having the knowledge of common genres (like Resumes) and valued practices (like conciseness). Eventually, she talked about what I believe to be the heart of her answer—that consulting from within that community of practice allows her to better understand the struggles of the writers she works with, which in turn allows them to place more immediate trust in her not only as a writing consultant, but as a business student. She explained that "from an accounting major standpoint, a lot of like the writers that come in [tell me] 'I don't really know why I'm doing this. I don't really care.' So I think that it is interesting for me to [be able to say]: I'm an accounting major, but that doesn't stop me. You're still a writer. Everyone is a writer. Everyone has the potential to be a better writer." Here, we see Kara using the values that she learned as a consultant (All writers have more to learn) to change the perception that students in her disciplinary community of accounting have of themselves as writers (apathetic writers) and about writing (that writing doesn't matter in the field of accounting). This shared disciplinary background situates Kara in a position to best empower other writers as she occupies a dual role of consultant and disciplinary member.

On the other hand, in articulating strategies for consultations with writers with whom they do not share any disciplinary expertise, participants demonstrated different strategies toward the same goal of establishing rapport. And, without sharing a disciplinary background, consultants recognize that it might not be as instant or intense of a connection. Allison described one consultation she had last year with a writer in sports management who had an assignment asking him about his career path. Allison admitted that "I don't know anything about [sports]. So it was hard immediately to connect with him because I don't understand what he does for fun. And he doesn't understand what I do for fun because I'm here at the library. [... So,] trying to empathize was definitely my first step." What I find really interesting here, is although the disconnect is rooted in disciplinarity because of the writer's major and assignment, Allison identifies not knowing what the other person "does for fun" as the barrier that she is trying to overcome through asking inquisitive questions such as "What sports do you like?" that are personal as much as they are professional.

Overall, consultants discussed how a shared disciplinary community can enable them to tailor feedback and build community. For writers with whom they did not share a disciplinary background, consultants enumerated the strategies of focusing on the writing expertise that you do have, looking up answers to questions that you have during and/or before a consultation, asking questions to friends and other consultants in that discipline to become more familiar with its expectations and student experiences, and both knowing for yourself and communicating with the writer that you do not, and in fact, cannot know everything about disciplinary writing. These strategies that consultants have developed represent both a shared expertise and shared practice within the community of the writing center. These strategies and their relation to the consultant's own disciplinary identity are developed and negotiated through their learning and participation in the writing center community—much of which is concentrated in the semester-long training course.

Consultants' Self-identification with Writing Center Studies

In contrast to the recurring theme of participants strongly identifying with and attributing their conceptions and values of writing to their disciplines, none of them directly and without hesitation identified themselves as part of the discipline of writing center studies.

Identification involves recognizing belonging to a particular group through the adoption of its discourses, genres, values, and understandings, which is what Hyland (2015) describes as proximity (p. 36). Similar to Wenger's (1998) communities of practice's concept of negotiability of a repertoire, Hyland's (2015) concept of proximity describes the relationship between self and community. In particular, both concepts enumerate the ways in which a member defines themselves both in relation to (individuality) and within (according to the values and practices of) the community. For consultants coming from all disciplinary backgrounds to the writing center, which may have very different values, discourses, genres, rhetorical conventions, etc. from their disciplines, their proximity to the "ways of being in the worlds" that the community creates possibilities for determines how, why, and in what ways they self-identify with writing centers as a community and writing studies as a discipline (Hyland 2015, p. 33)

Identity is not self-image nor is participation in a community of practice dependent on identifying oneself as a member (Wenger, 1998). But, there is something fascinating here about how even though consultants readily identify themselves as part of the writing center community, clearly and confidently articulating their consultant identities, they see participation in a discipline as something mostly separate. This feeling of liminality that consultants are experiencing, exemplified in their "maybe…but" and "sort of… if" responses, can also be a sign of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which newcomers become experienced members in the community of practice first by engaging in peripheral activities. Or, in this case, peripheral identification. Participation in these peripheral activities provides newcomers with a means to learn the vocabulary, practices, goals, and social norms of that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Consultants may be navigating this ongoing process of enculturation as members of the writing center community. This could also be because they see membership in a discipline as having different parameters[9] than membership in the writing center's community.

Roozen (2010) defines the four domains of disciplinary expertise as having advanced knowledge of the subject matter, being immersed in the discipline's discourse community, and being familiar with both the rhetorical moves and genre features needed to complete disciplinary writing tasks (p. 346). I argue that in the writing center's community of practice, consultants gain these areas of disciplinary expertise through their participation. Consultants gain expertise in subject matter through the readings and discussions embedded into the training course and ongoing professional development that seeks to build upon and expand that knowledge. As demonstrated by this research, consultants have theory-based consulting practices that come from understanding this vital content knowledge and the awareness to identify and describe it. Because of this,

[9] The writing center is a job but because it is also a community of practice it is a site for disciplinary action, application, and enculturation. But, because participants association of discipline seemed to be tied to their education (i.e. their major)—even as they identified and demonstrated their writing expertise and its application—for them the writing center exists in a grey area between job and discipline that feels separate.

consultants are equipped with the language and the means to contribute to the HWC's writing center discourse community through formal and informal routes[10] and are immersed in that discourse community throughout their employment. Consultants receive formal instruction on consulting genres such as Client Report Forms and writer feedback through the training course. Other genres such as meeting notes for SIGs, observation reflections, and time card request formstacks emerge as they participate in the community as practitioners. Finally, consultants learn the rhetorical moves of consulting through a variety of methods, including but not limited to readings from training, observations, and scaffolded and informal discussions with other consultants. Common rhetorical moves manifest themselves as consulting strategies and might include moves such as asking the writer questions about their day to establish rapport, explaining options for reading strategies, and collaboratively filling out the client report form with a writer at the end of a session.

At the same time that participants often identified feeling like they were on the "threshold" of being a part of the discipline, they clearly and quickly enumerated the ways in which they enact the "ways of knowing and doing" that characterizes writing center studies (Carter, 2007). They read writing center scholarship that communicates the values and expectations of the discipline and enact that through their consultations. In particular, the speed and confidence with which consultants were able to identify the consulting values that contribute to their consulting identity and motivation, and how those values manifest through practice, suggests the efficacy of threshold-concept-based training. For example, when asked about her consulting identity and what drives her to continually want to be a part of the HWC, Kara immediately identified that "for me, a big principle that I repeat to writers all the time is that all writers have more to learn." She then articulated how this threshold concept and principle of the writing center represents the central underpinning to her consulting practice: making the writer feel heard and affirming the validity of their ideas and the effectiveness of their writing. She describes that because "people have told me I'm a rambling writer—that I'm a bad writer. [... So when] writers come in and [say] 'I'm not a good writer and I don't enjoy it' [...then…] the identity that I want to portray is a peer and a cheerleader, kind of just someone who's like rooting for them." Kara, in demonstrating how this theory-based principle of the writing center not only informs her practice but contributes hugely to her consultant identity, is embodying the ways of knowing and doing that is representative of writing studies as a discipline.

Across the board, participants seemed to narrow in on the distinction between producing and applying research. Their conceptualization of what research is and the role that research plays in disciplinary participation dictated how strongly they identified with writing center studies. When asked about how or whether she identifies herself as part of writing center studies as a discipline, Astrid replied "I suppose so. I think I would feel more a part of it if I did a study like this [thesis] and felt like it contributed to it." Notably, Astrid's response reveals an affective component to self-identifying as a member of a discipline.

[10] Formal routes could be research developed for conference presentations, partnership projects, or prompted discussions during seminars. Informal routes could be conversations with other consultants in the lounge or writing their answer and responding to others when the community white board's question of the week is based in writing center discourse (i.e. What is your best piece of writing advice?)

Additionally, this calls attention to the need for making visible the impact of peer consultants' research in the field of writing center studies (Ervin 2016). Participants made a distinction between the feeling that they were immersed in and contributing to our writing center and its community of practice, versus feeling a part of the discipline of writing studies as a whole. Freddie described their limited interaction with and participation in writing centers, saying that "I wouldn't say it contributed anything to it yet. So I consider myself a part of our writing center, [but] not a part of writing centers as a whole. It's not like I have interacted with anyone outside of our writing center." In this case, membership in a community is not being conceptualized by consultants as the same thing as membership in a discipline[11]. This raises questions for further research about what the benefits of consultants identifying with the discipline of writing studies might be and the ways in which training and ongoing development can create pathways for participation and make visible consultants' contributions to the discipline.

Even when participants recognize that they do conduct research in the context of the writing center, they view this research as distinct from the research they conduct in their academic disciplines. For example, Lovie identified that she does participate in and conduct research by collaborating with other consultants to research writing center questions that are important to them during partnerships. However, her ownership over the research in the HWC doesn't ring as true for her, even as she considers herself a scholar and practitioner of the field. She explains that "I think of myself as like a scholar of like writing and writing theory, but I don't necessarily think of myself as a producer of writing research. Even though we do things like partnerships, I just don't feel, you know, [the same as] I do when I'm doing a history honors thesis." The intensity, scope, and longevity of research performed as part of ongoing development in the writing center vs. an honors thesis, which serves as the cornerstone of one's academic disciplinary education, may explain how although these two things both fall under the umbrella of research, broadly construed, they feel very different and thus, Lovie conceptualizes them as different forms of participation.

In some cases, participants' affiliations with the practices for research in their academic disciplinary communities are in tension with writing studies, creating a barrier for self-identification with writing center studies research. For example, Freddie described how their background in statistical methods which comes from being a Data Science & Statistics major impacts how they view the methodological soundness of writing center studies research. Although they are very interested in writing center studies and generally agree with a lot of the conclusions of said research, they "feel a lot of hesitancy to contribute because of some of the methods." Because of their background and disciplinary expertise, Freddie is especially drawn to investigating a study's methods, describing that "I read over surveys and I'm like, 'that's not really how you do a properly done survey or how you take information.'" This dose of skepticism comes in part because writing studies as a field in the humanities, and Freddie does not feel an affiliation with and in fact, doesn't "necessarily trust most of the methods [in the humanities because] it doesn't stand in terms of how you do statistics. When they take surveys,

[11] This divide in identification could be explained, in part, by the impact of Covid on the writing center community. The writing center has a tradition of mentoring and supporting consultants in presenting at writing center conferences, which has been made more difficult as a result of the pandemic, therefore decreasing the interaction with other writing centers. Additionally, some consultants completed their training course online, which might account for their membership feeling different.

they don't get a large enough pool and they usually do it entirely voluntary based, which is not going to help them get a representative pool." But Freddie makes the distinction that even though "to an extent, I do feel a friction with the research itself and with their methods" this does not mean that they do not recognize, contribute to, and value writing studies research (as also evidenced by their eager participation in this writing center research study). It just means that writing program administration must pay attention to how research is taught in the disciplines, what notions of research consultants are bringing from their experiences, and what barriers that might provide to participating in and identifying themselves as researchers within the writing center community.

Finally, time spent immersed in the community also might increase consultants' self-identification with writing center studies as a discipline. Eve discussed that part of the reason that they felt so connected to writing center studies as a discipline was due to the longevity of their time working there (which, at the time of the interview, was 4 semesters), the people, and the ongoing programming that focused on consultant development.

> I feel like I've been sucked into the Writing center theory and all of that just by being here for so long that I have to care about it now. And I do care about it now. And that's something I actually tell people all the time—that being a consultant [and] the writing center is one of the best experiences I've had at Miami just because Lizzie and Kate and everyone, they care; they care a lot about like training us, thoroughly training us and keeping the learning going. And I think if it was more of, okay, take your class and then just go and we're not going to talk to you anymore—like a hands-off approach—that would be not as fulfilling for me. So although I don't really I don't consider myself an expert on the writing center theory, I'm glad that I've gotten to learn about it more. [Before being a consultant] it was something I didn't think about at all. [... Now], maybe down the road I could see myself working at a college writing center as a grad student.

Eve speaks about expertise, but what their answer reveals is that identifying with a discipline is a largely affective/emotional as well as intellectual endeavor. Their ongoing participation in and learning as a result of the writing center community, spurred on by the alignment of their disciplinary experiences, means that their identity as a consultant and their writing expertise has become a crucial part of their life trajectory.

At the time that I asked participants this question about their self-identification with writing center studies, I was thinking of it as a discipline because in higher education, disciplines are the organizational units through which we are taught to think about the different subsections of our academic lives. I saw the ways in which writing center ways of knowing, doing, and writing were distinct and I associated that with disciplinary status. But now, upon further reflection and reading, I realize this question of the disciplinary status of writing center studies is much more complicated. Writing centers are distinct from other disciplines in that they do not have a major associated with it, their avenues for resources are different, and they doesn't fit under departmental umbrellas as neatly as some other disciplines do. But, as this research demonstrates, clearly engagement in writing centers is transformative and influential for participants' writing identities', values, and practices, and the same holds true for engagement in disciplinary communities of practice. But, participants' personal history of participation in these

two realms—writing centers and their academic disciplines—is vastly different. For example, in their disciplines, participants complete extensive coursework that is often associated with a future career goal. In the writing center, consultants take one training course and then become practitioners. While some participants identified that their work consulting would help them in future jobs (as was the case with Astrid and Lovie, who both hope to go on to be teachers) or that they could see themselves working in writing centers in the future (as shown with Eve as they contemplated graduate school), their participation in the writing center community is not directly connected to their career goals in the same way that their academic disciplinary communities are. Communities of practice, then, is a useful framework for studying the layered influence of multiple communities on a participants learning, identity, and practice, because communities with different structures and classifications can be analyzed through a common vocabulary and frame that focuses on the qualities of membership. In other words, whether or not we classify writing center studies as a discipline, a subdiscipline, a community, etc., while still a critically important question, becomes less of an urgent in regards to the scope and aim of this analysis. Still, I propose the need for a future research that addresses the following questions: In what ways is it useful or not useful for writing center members of various positionalities (administrators, consultants, writers) to view writing center studies as a discipline, subdiscipline, not a discipline, etc.? What is a framework that we can develop for understanding the impact of participation in the writing center community on consultants' future trajectories? In what ways might it be useful for consultants to reflect upon their self-identification, including their personal histories trajectories of participation, with the writing center?

Ultimately, this line of inquiry into how, in what ways, and why participants do and don't self-identify as part of the writing studies discipline as a result of their experiences as a consultant reveals evidence for how participants are thinking about disciplinary participation as comparative, affective, and steeped in ideas about what constitutes research and contributions to the field. It also illustrates how consultants are conceptualizing and connecting to writing center research to various degrees. In the next chapter, I explore the implications of this research by sharing recommendations for further developing and building on consultant training that highlights consultants' disciplinary expertise and develops their writing expertise and elaborating on future research to be done.

Chapter 3: Implications

In this implications section, I discuss recommendations for consultant training and ongoing development, beginning with implications for the HWC, the writing center context in which participants are immersed, before expanding out into implications for writing centers more broadly and for the field of writing studies. Ultimately, this section contextualizes and synthesizes data to recommend strategies for consultant training that promote the celebration of disciplinary expertise and encourage multiple forms of participation in the writing center as a community of practice. Finally, I discuss further avenues for inquiry that this research illuminates and their importance for the field.

Recommendations for Consultant Training & Development

For writing center consultants, there exists a "crucial link between self-concept and training" which is why it is valuable to understand how threshold concept-based tutor training model shapes their consultant identity (Hemmeter, 1994, p. 35). Furthermore, threshold concepts can be as troublesome as they are transformative, but by incorporating threshold concepts of writing into tutor training, we create a curriculum that prompts consultants to grapple with themselves as writers and grow as tutors (Dinitz, 2018). Building on the foundation of consultant expertise and identity that threshold concept-based training facilitates, I synthesize participant responses to offer insights into how to support consultants in capitalizing on their disciplinary identities and expertise in the writing center.

Participants identified parts of the training and development that were especially helpful and impacted how they were able to successfully navigate consulting in all different disciplines. Most prominent was a commendation for having consultants from all disciplines. Though there is a heavy draw from the English department, the HWC recruits consultants from all disciplines, especially since we have a satellite location that focuses specifically on serving writers in the Farmer School of Business. Participants explained that this discipline diversity aided the productive experiences of having open discussions about threshold concepts during training with people who have different backgrounds and perspectives, and simply being able to talk to and learn from other consultants both about their disciplines and their consulting strategies. These discussions with diverse perspectives are a vital part of building a community of practice through a network of relationships and facilitated learning. As part of the writing center's administration team, we do outreach to all departments during the period of time that recruiting for new consultants takes place. However, we recognize some barriers that exist and are working to build partnerships with departments across the university to recruit consultants from all disciplines more effectively.

In fact, a greater diversity of majors[12], while recommended by most consultants, was something that Freddie, a consultant who comes from a non-humanities discipline, brought up immediately.

> I know that this is what the writing center wants, but having a greater diversity of majors and opinions I think would be very helpful. Sometimes, in the training course, I would feel like I was… I felt like we were apart in terms of what our experiences were and that sometimes English majors can have a common perspective about things. I can't even remember an example but sometimes [it would feel like a] very homogenous opinion. To an extent where I feel like we [non-english majors] would sometimes share that homogeneous opinion when it was something that I just didn't really believe in.

[12] At the time of this research 16 out of 32 (50%) consultants (undergraduate and graduate) had at least one major or area of study that was in an English related discipline, including Professional Writing, Literature, Creative Writing, Journalism, English Education and Strategic Communication. While this is quite a significant percentage, I think that it does not paint the whole picture because of the different combinations of majors and minors—both in and out of English—that consultants are pursuing. Between the 25 undergraduate consultants, they represent a total of 38 different majors, co-majors, and minors. If we include graduate consultants, the number of disciplines represented jumps up to 42.

What Freddie identified here verges toward groupthink, which is detrimental to a community of practice. “Disagreement, challenges and competition can all be forms of participation”, and without those types of participation brought on by varied disciplinary perspectives, the community of consultants would lose the diversity of thought and approach that contributes to their shared practice (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Geller et al., 2007, p.7). Here, we see how the disciplinary backgrounds of the consultants who are a part of this community have a major impact on their experience in training. In the institutional context of the HWC, the writing center exists outside of the English department but still has close ties. For example, both the Director of the Writing Center and the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum are English faculty, and thus, close departmental ties open up avenues for collaboration and recruiting new consultants. By building partnerships across other departments, outreach to recruit new consultants from all disciplines may be more impactful.

Additionally, Freddie tied their response back to the idea of expertise in an exchange we had during the interview.

> Freddie: And of course, that’s a working problem. I know there are studies [that say] you should have non-English majors as peer tutors. And I guess some people would say that [it’s not as useful] having non-English majors who aren’t really experts in writing because I had no training in how to do writing besides like one English course…
>
> Emma: But like… you do [have that expertise].
>
> Freddie: But like I do. And I think that’s why it’s helpful to have more people from different disciplines.

I find this exchange illuminating because it shows that consultants in majors other than those housed or associated with English might have an additional barrier to identifying their writing center expertise. Because even though Freddie strongly identifies as a writer explicitly and confidently—“I really consider myself a writer”— there still seems to exist this idea that writing expertise is tied to the English disciplines, exemplified when Freddie talks about only having taken one English course. Thus, writing center administrators should focus not only on recruiting consultants from all disciplines but also on making sure that the training is emphasizing and valuing the disciplinary expertise that they bring, and highlighting the writing expertise that they are gaining through their participation.

The most resounding recommendation from participants for improving confidence and competence in navigating disciplinary expertise during consultations was to draw on the expertise of the current community of consultants by opening up an official space for those informal conversations to happen. Lovie articulates how carving out this time and space for consultants to learn from each other would be immediate and impactful: “I would love to ask that question, the one you asked about how your disciplines affect your writing. I would love to have all of the people answer that […because] I'm curious what things they're pulling in that I just wouldn't because my disciplines are different and vice versa.” I propose that either during the training course or during seminars which are part of the ongoing development series, consultants from all disciplines could have the opportunity to share the common genres, shared values, and

widespread expectations of writing in their discipline. In the form of 5-minute informal talks with a visual slide to accompany them, consultants would be able to learn about disciplinary writing from their peers who are engaged in these disciplines within the same institutional context as the writers they will be working with and who have the training to think about writing with a certain depth and from a rhetorical perspective. Furthermore, this simultaneously affirms the presenters' disciplinary expertise, provides a way for consultants to get to know each other better, and opens the door for further conversations outside of official training and development time.

Another method for collaborating with fellow consultants to understand disciplinary expectations and crowdsource strategies emerged from a consultant who said:

> I wish we did more case studies in seminars. I think what would be really, really useful is… and this is once again has been speaking very practically, an exercise that I have found helpful working with other consultants just colloquially is you look at a piece of writing that is given to you and as a group, you pick it apart. [...As a consultant, you] have to be able to read and break down pieces of writing in a really quick manner. The quicker you can diagnose problems, the better it is for the writer. Because that way you have more time to discuss, explain, and work with brainstormed solutions. And so if you could take two or three seminars a semester. And say, we have this lab report. What are they doing? Maybe, what could they be doing better? [...] If you want people—in my opinion, at least— to be better at dealing with the different disciplines, they have to have seen the discipline[’s writing] before. They don’t have to have in-depth knowledge, but it is good if you’re dealing with a lab report to know what a lab report looks like, as a general rule.

Like a true practitioner, this consultant is suggesting that administration scaffold opportunities for consultants to collaborate with one another to capitalize on and sharpen the skills that they use in consulting daily. The consultant’s response also recognizes the meta-genre expertise that consultants have and argues for this skill to be practiced while simultaneously introducing consultants to examples of genres in disciplines they may not be as familiar with.

The potential activities described above get at this combination of digging deeper into common genres and making explicit the disciplines’ values and motivations surrounding writing. Discussing genres within a discourse community can illuminate that community's values and how a member's work contributes to the community as a whole (Gordan, 2014). We can apply this line of reasoning not only to preparing consultants to discuss genre theory's implications with writers, but also to the genres consultants engage with in training and ongoing development, thus making visible their contributions to the discipline through their participation in the community. The benefit of these activities is not only to polish their meta-genre expertise or familiarize them with new genres but to empower consultants to *feel and recognize* the expertise that they have and the way they can apply it to consultations.

Participants also identified that they valued their generalist training which focuses on strategies that can be applied situationally and drew on resources from the training course such as slide presentations and readings. They recommended updating and expanding the disciplinary writing

guide resources on the writing center page (which breaks down common genres such as literature reviews, scientific reports, and personal statements currently).

Additionally, I propose that an area for further research is enhancing and extending collaboration across Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing Center programs. This collaboration would highlight the valuable insights that both faculty and writing consultants have on disciplinary writing, which could inform the other community's conceptions of and practices for disciplinary writing (Harrington et al., 2017; Scott, 2015; Thomas, 2019; Wallace, 1988). Institutional contexts would play a role in what this further collaboration could look like. For example, the HWC is housed with the WAC program under the umbrella of the Howe Center for Writing Excellence (HWCE), which primes these programs with the ability for a specific collaboration because of the communication and coordination that already exists between administration. In other words, at the HWCE, the writing center and WAC programs have overlapping communities of practice with a shared foundation in threshold concepts. Communities of practice can align with an organizational unit or not (Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor, 2015). In this case, the two communities of practice have different domains of interest (with the writing center focused on serving writers and WAC invested in the development of teachers) but share the same principles of the HWCE (threshold concepts) that drive their work and color both community's repertoires of practice. As this research demonstrates, a threshold concept approach to training meant that consultants were largely able to articulate the values of their consultant identity readily and passionately, often quoting the threshold concepts verbatim. In the WAC program, one of the first things that faculty fellows do in their semester-long certification is articulate threshold concepts for their field. With both programs grounded in these same principles and a shared vocabulary of threshold concepts, this structure might be uniquely positioned to facilitate such a partnership between faculty and consultants to promote the support of disciplinary writers.

An enhanced collaboration between writing center and WAC programs would be beneficial because while this research demonstrates that consultants have developed strategies for working with specialist writing, there are benefits to a specialist approach to tutoring (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). But more importantly, because generalist vs. specialist is a binary that becomes blurred in practice, we need to account for and construct programming that supports the "blending of specialist knowledge with generalist strategies (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016, p. 149). For this middle ground, consultants need meta-disciplinary expertise to be able to respond as insiders and/or outsiders to that community. Rather than getting information and learning about the disciplines from writing center administrators (who largely have a background or affiliation with English or Writing Studies disciplines), consultants can hear directly from the faculty who are teaching the writers who come into the center. Consultants could benefit from seeing how the faculty in these disciplines conceptualize writing and how that is being translated into the genres and expectations of their writing assignments.

Likewise, further developing methods of collaboration between the WAC and Writing Center programs would be beneficial for faculty. Disciplinary writing is of a specialized nature and learning to write in that discourse community is an ongoing, often difficult process that calls for a need for explicit instruction (Hyland, 2018). Because of their positionality as peers to writers and their expertise in writing processes, consultants are uniquely positioned to be able to provide

feedback to faculty on what is happening with an assignment in the time between when the professor assigns it and when a final draft gets turned in.

Ultimately, consultant training is a vital part of enculturating consultants into the writing centers community of practice. Though training is institutionally specific and already packed with key theories and practical logistics, it is necessary to consider what writing expertise consultants are gaining from this experience and how this impacts their consulting strategies. Ongoing professional development opportunities that connect consultants with different disciplinary practices through each other, enhancing their meta-genre knowledge through case studies, and enhanced collaboration with WAC programs offer some avenues toward this goal of recognizing, building, and capitalizing on consultant expertise.

Implications for Future Research

Both this research's findings and limitations illuminate paths for further research, which can be taken up by writing center scholars interested in the link between tutor training and the development of consultant identity, the interaction between disciplinary and consultant expertise in consultations, and the impact of consultants' layered disciplinary identities.

My research is heavily situated in the institutional context of Miami University and the community context of the Howe Writing Center. Thus, the results of my study are not widely generalizable. Instead, my research demonstrates how threshold concept-based tutor training facilitates the development of a consultant identity that is heavily based on those concepts and values. Further research across institutions with different models for tutor training could provide more varied insight into the connection between consultants' identity and articulated consultant expertise to the types of genres and theories consultants are engaging with during tutor training, which represents not only a time when consultants are receiving sustained formal instruction, but a crucial time period where they are being introduced to the sub-discipline of writing center studies and are beginning to be enculturated into their specific writing center community.

Employing different methodologies could cultivate new insights into this key topic of disciplinary and consultant identity and expertise and its role in the writing center community. A limitation of my study design in interviewing participants is that my data indicates consultants' *perceptions* of their identity and expertise. Consultants discuss how their disciplinary and consultant identity and expertise manifest in the strategies they use during writing center consultations, and while understanding how consultants are conceptualizing these concepts is important, it may reflect a more idealized representation. Thus, by combining interviews about disciplinary and consultant expertise with observations of consultants, future research could garner a better understanding of how that expertise is being deployed and received in real-time, allowing the data to speak to what is happening in the consultations themselves.

Moreover, even within the same institutional context, future studies interested in the link between tutor training and consultant identity and expertise could employ different methods that are best suited for this more specific inquiry. For example, a field study of the tutor training course would be well-suited to understanding how a threshold concept model of tutor training develops consultant expertise and identity, as well as introduces them to writing center values

and core competencies of writing studies. By observing the training course, as well as conducting focus groups at key points throughout the semester (e.g. as they begin the course, as they start consulting midway through the semester, as they do their final project researching a writing center question of their choice at the end of the semester), this analysis could investigate the specific ways in which threshold concept-based tutor training is enculturating new consultants into the HWC's community of practice.

This thesis also indicates some broader implications for writing centers. Future research might look more closely at the link between consultant identity and consultants' research in the writing center. Furthermore, future research might look to explore these topics by conducting collaborative research with consultants, which would further position consultants as practitioners and researchers, cementing their agency and contributions to the community. In collaborating with consultants to conduct research on consulting, models of collaboration between consultants and both writing center directors and graduate assistant directors could be developed and shared.

Finally, though it fell outside the scope of my thesis, my data reveals the need for future research that addresses how disciplinary and other identity factors (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, cultural background, etc.) intersect and impact how they conceptualize, value, and do writing. For example, Teddy demonstrated by reciting the Jewish parable of the cat and the mice that his background and identity as Jewish informs his identities in other realms, such as that as a consultant in the writing center and as a disciplinary writer in his coursework. Further research could illuminate the multiple layering, tensions, and influence of these various dimensions of identity and how they impact writing conceptions and practices in disciplinary communities.

This thesis reveals the importance of centering the voices and insights of consultants in conversations within the writing center and even conversations around disciplinarity that are of interest to writing studies and writing across the curriculum. Much of the research on consultants that happens in the writing center studies consultants through the lens of how they are affecting and impacting the writer. For example, oftentimes research that examines consultant identity and expertise studies this construct with the aim of understanding how it impacts their available strategies, with the ultimate goal of improving the effectiveness of a consultation for the writer. While my research does investigate consultants' strategies based on their disciplinary identity and expertise and in relation to the writer's disciplinary background, the heart of this research is understanding consultants' conceptions of and interaction between their identity, expertise, and writing in the writing center and in their disciplines toward the ultimate goal of supporting, developing, and celebrating consultants. In centering consultants' voices, our writing center and disciplinary communities themselves, as well as research on those communities and their applications can be enriched.

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