Consultant Development

Last year, consultant development featured instructional segments exclusively taught by Directors and Administrators. This was mainly because the majority of consultants were new and had minimal experience with writing centers and the work they do. This past year has involved continuous development of our consultants’ skills. Some consultants who have become experts at certain aspects of development over the past year were then able to teach their skill this year.

This new way of teaching development was part of a move towards overall professional development in the Writing Center. Consultants who work in the Writing Center are encouraged to participate in many tasks that will give them skills they can then apply to the work force and world outside of Pitt State. Presenting at the consultant development retreat taught such skills as planning lessons and tasks, and conveying the most important aspects of a skill in an environment similar to a classroom.

Senior consultant Kevin McCollam and former consultant Mary Calhoun presented their research on effective feedback in e-mail consultations. To prepare for the presentation, Kevin looked back on methods used in consultant development previously, then borrowed those ideas to start up discussion.

Tisha presented on how to be an efficient receptionist. The planning process began with lists of the most important customer service skills that new consultants need to provide a wonderful experience for clients. One of the most valuable things Tisha learned for the professional world was how to plan a lesson and adapt that lesson to time limitations.

Bart, who taught new consultants—and reminded returning consultants—how to transcribe using our transcription software, says that helping train co-workers has mostly been about putting the pieces of his education together. This task required Bart to use his training from the communication department to communicate clearly and effectively without coming across as pushy or rude. Being able to learn a specific task, expressing ways to complete the task to people who don’t have experience with the task, and communicating at a post-collegiate level are skills Bart exercised in this task.

Glenn was the authority on grammar during consultant development. His favorite part of the experience was “seeing the learning process from the other side.” Glenn became interested in grammar after an undergraduate paper was marked down for grammar mistakes. The preparation Glenn did for teaching grammar to other consultants showed him that grammar is a revision skill. He also learned how to trim down a mass of information to the basics in order to instruct others in a way that wasn’t overwhelming.

Consultant Research Spotlight

Many of our consultants are interested in various aspects of the writing center as an institution and the practices of writing center consultants. This has sparked an array of research projects for our consultants. Taylor is interested in researching praise in the writing center, specifically in consultations. She hopes her research will provide insight into her research questions, which include “When do consultants give positive feedback in the form of praise during consultations? Why do they do this? What is their motivation in doing so? What good does praise do in a consultation? What purpose does praise serve? Is it effective? What are alternatives to praise that are more effective?”

Taylor has already made a discovery about praise in the writing center through her research: “We all know that praise has some potentially detrimental effects, and most of us do what we can to avoid using it during appointments. However, we’ve found evidence of praise in nearly every transcribed consultation thus far.”

One of the goals of the research is to “categorize these instances in order to determine their motivation and purpose.” She also hopes to “develop a list of suitable alternatives that consultants can use when working with clients.”

Taylor hopes to present her research at either the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association or Northeast Writing Centers Associate in April.
Say “Hello” to our New Consultants

Lora is a new Assistant Director of the Writing Center. She graduated from Pittsburg State University with an M.A. in English with an emphasis in Literature in 2012, and a BSEd in English Education in 2010. She loves reading, knitting, and sleeping. She has one baby, three cats, and a husband that keep her from spending time on her hobbies.

Diane comes from Fresno, California. She obtained her M.F.A. in Creative Writing, Creative Nonfiction, and an advanced certificate in Composition from Fresno State. She also earned a certificate in Postsecondary Reading and Learning from CSU Fullerton. Before coming to PSU, she was a lecturer at the University of Nevada, Reno. She enjoys playing guitar, singing off-key, and visiting her grand-twins. Her husband and two puppies plan to join her in Pittsburg in the spring.

Brad was born in Joplin, MO and received his Bachelor’s of Science in Business Administration from the University of Tulsa in 2012. While in college, Brad was a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and played intramural sports. After graduation, he spent a year and a half working in medical sales and distribution with the McKesson Corporation. Brad is currently working towards his Master’s in Business Administration. In his spare time, he enjoys playing golf, competitive shooting sports, and spending time with his yellow Labrador Retriever, Sir Charles. Brad also enjoys watching action movies and believes that “Gladiator” was the last good action movie made.

Anna is a junior in the English Education program and spends most of her time reading, writing, and analyzing. She loves doing these things, but also loves watching British television and listening to music with her Labrador and her 17-year-old brother, Jake. She is (slightly) obsessed with all types of dancing and traveling. When she’s not watching Netflix or scrolling through Tumblr, she is more than likely watching YouTube vloggers like Vlogbrothers and Crash Course. In the future, Anna hopes to get a teaching job in a bigger city, and create her own YouTube channel for students. She would also like to note that she does have friends, and doesn’t spend all of her time on the computer.

Jessica is a sixth year senior who is finally walking across the stage in May. She is an English major with an emphasis in Creative Writing. Her preference is fiction, but a mutual respect for poetry is slowly emerging. She is also working on a minor in Women’s Studies. Jess is a long distance runner and a member of the Pitt State Women’s Track and Cross Country program. Jess was National Runner-up last year at the Division II National Cross Country Championship. She is a four time All-American and holds the current school record in the Outdoor 5K after breaking a record that stood for twenty years. She hopes to snag a few more before she leaves. Jess spends her free time bingeing on Netflix one show at a time and caring for her cat, Rufio who is like a tiny, needy human with an attitude problem. Her typical daily schedule: run, eat, sleep, cat, homework, read essays, run, cat, homework, eat, sleep.

Coming up in the Writing Center @ PSU...

The Writing Center @ PSU will be hosting an expansion of “National Day on Writing” from October 20-23. The four-day event will include interactive activities for anyone on campus who wishes to participate. Participants can write a haiku for a cookie, help us build a collaborative story, read their writing (or their favorite piece of writing) at the open mic, and stay up late with us during the writing marathon for academic or creative endeavors.

We will also be hosting the National Novel Writing Month event in November. The event’s aim is to support and encourage writers as they strive towards a 50,000 word novel by the end of the month. There will be an opportunity to submit novel premises to win a prize. We will have prizes for those who participate in the event. There will be a write-in event where clients can come in after hours to write with other writers. Details about dates will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

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