Why Did You Come In Today?:

The Role of Graduate Assistant Tutoring in Undergraduate Student Revision

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Abstract

This study examines the reasons why undergraduate students use the graduate assistant tutoring, offered by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point English department, to revise their papers. The first chapter reviews the literature on revision and includes an examination of the challenges professors face when responding to student papers. Books and articles describing different methods to use during peer review sessions were also included in this review. In the following chapter, the English graduate assistant position at UW-Stevens Point is then described in relation to recent literature.

Surveys were used to gather information from students who have attended multiple sessions of graduate assistant tutoring. The responses collected were combined with information from the literature to form possible conclusions as to why students choose graduate assistant tutoring. Observations from previous semesters were also included to support these conclusions. The procedures used to gather the data and the conclusions drawn are described in detail in third chapter. The implications of this study on my future teaching are in the final chapter. This chapter also includes suggestions for future research on the use of graduate assistant tutoring.

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Introduction

When I was offered the English department graduate assistant position at UW-Stevens Point, I was told that the bulk of my time would be spent working one-on-one with undergraduate students to improve their papers. The chair of the English department, Dr. Michael Williams, and my supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Stephens, had faith in my ability to workshop papers because I had been trained by the UW-Stevens Point Tutoring-Learning Center, and I had taught secondary English classes for almost two years.

During my first year as grad assistant, I was surprised by the number of students who came to see me. I had been given the impression that not many students utilized grad assistant tutoring. I was also surprised when I realized that the majority of students returned for help with subsequent papers. As I continued to work as the grad assistant, I noticed that some students even returned for help semesters after they first worked with me.

During the summer between my first and second year as grad assistant, my thesis advisor and I met to discuss possible topics. I knew I wanted to connect my research to my work as the grad assistant, but I couldn't figure out the specific question I wanted to research. The answer came to me about a month into the fall 2012 semester. In the same week, I met with two students who came in for a session because their peer review partners hadn't offered them any suggestions for revision.

After my sessions with these students, I paid extra attention to the reasons students gave for coming in for tutoring. I began to realize that students were coming to me because I was filling a need in their revision process that wasn't being met. Then I started to wonder what

exactly this need was which led me to research the role graduate assistant tutoring plays in undergraduate students' revision process.

In order to properly analyze the role grad assistant tutoring plays in revision, I had to learn more about the revision in general and about the graduate assistant position at UW-Stevens Point. I started by researching the role feedback, from peers and professors, plays in revision. Then I interviewed three former graduate assistants to see if their experience had been similar to mine; except for a few similarities, our experiences were completely different. I decided to survey the students who came in multiple times to learn more about their view of the role grad assistant tutoring played in the revision process.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to learn more about the role graduate assistant tutoring plays in undergraduate students' revision process, it was first necessary to research the role feedback of any kind plays in students' revision process.

Literature Review

In her article, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Nancy Sommers compares students' understanding of the revision process with experienced writers understanding of the revision process. One of the main differences Sommers found during her research was that experienced writers consider revision a continuous process that occurs simultaneously as they write their draft. As one writer put it "I rewrite as I write. It is hard to tell what is a first draft because it is not determined by time…I am constantly writing and rewriting" (Sommers "Revision" 384). Student writers, however, think of revision "as a separate stage at the end of the [writing] process" (Sommers "Revision" 384).

Sommers also noted differences in the types of revisions the writers make. Student writers focus mainly on "lexical changes" while experienced writers address the bigger issues that affect the ideas in their paper (Sommers "Revision" 381). Sommers noticed that:

The experienced writers describe their primary objective when revising as *finding the form or shape of their argument*. Although the metaphors vary, the experienced writers

often use structural expressions such as "finding a framework," "a pattern," or "a design" for their argument. ("Revision" 384, emphasis mine)

Sommers explains that one reason behind the two different approaches is that student writers write for "a teacher-reader who expects compliance with rules … and will cite any violations of [those] rules" ("Revision" 383). Experienced writers, on the other hand, "have abstracted the standards of a reader and this reader seems to be partially a reflection of themselves and functions as a critical and productive collaborator" (Sommers "Revision" 385). Sommers's conclusion is that it is the experienced writers' ability to see "revision as a recursive process" that sets them apart from student writers and makes them more successful in achieving their goal of a cohesive essay ("Revision" 386).

In her 2006 article "Across the Drafts," Nancy Sommers conducted another study on revision, but this time Sommers focused on the impact professors' written comments have on students' growth as writers. Sommers found that "feedback plays a leading role in undergraduate writing development when, but only when, students and teachers create a partnership through feedback" ("Across" 250). In this partnership, both the professor and the student treat the written comments as instructional opportunities. Sommers states that professors need to include *both* criticism *and instruction* in their written comments so that students can apply the comments to future writing assignments.

Unfortunately, creating "perfect comment" puts a lot of pressure on the professor. Gordon Harvey analyzes, and also laments, the many roles professors fill as they write comments on their students' drafts in his article "Repetitive Strain: The Injuries of Responding to Student Writing." Like Sommers in "Across the Drafts," Harvey comments on the importance of

responding to student papers in at least some capacity. However, Harvey claims that professors are required to serve as more than just instructor and critic when writing their comments. Harvey briefly describes several of the other roles a professor has to fill, such as "coach," "judge," "fellow writer," "teacher-sage," "trainer in manners" and "representative academic reader" (46). Harvey states that the greatest challenge about writing comments is having to fill multiple roles at the same time. Harvey also argues that despite the many gimmicks professors invent, there is no set way to make responding to student papers easier.

The best solution to reduce the strain of responding to student papers would be to address the issues before students get to their final drafts. Effective review sessions, specifically peer review sessions, can make a big difference in the quality of student writing. For this reason, students need to be taught proper procedures for reviewing their classmates' papers. Steven Strang offers one possible model for peer review in his article "Product and Process: The Author-Led Workshop." Strang's model works because "the writer, readers, and teacher all have *defined roles to fill*, and those roles help the workshop give as much information and instruction as possible in the time allotted" (327, emphasis mine). Strang's model is very structured and includes suggested exercises to prepare students for their roles.

What is most interesting about Strang's author-led workshop model is the role the teacher plays in the whole process. Early on, when students are still new to the procedures, the teacher's job is to model what the author is expected to do when leading a workshop. Strang suggests using published works during these practice workshops. Once the students are capable of leading the workshops on their own, the teacher's role changes from instructor to audience member. The student readers should be the ones doing the majority of the talking while the teacher may occasionally serve as moderator. Strang explains that the bulk of the teacher's responsibility

comes at the end of the workshop. After the student readers have had a chance to share the comments and the writer has indicated s/he has no more questions:

> He (or she) should summarize in detail what has occurred. This is important for four reasons. First, his summary of the major areas of criticism and of praise gives the writer time to put her thoughts in writing. Second, the teacher may raise any important issues that the writer might not have pursued in enough detail. *Third, he challenges any questionable advice given in the heat of discussion.* Finally, he may refer to previously discussed student works, either a hint to the earlier writer…or a hint to the present writer. (330, emphasis mine)

Strang's author-led approach would work well in conjunction with the peer review models given in Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff's book *Sharing and Responding* because it is another way for the author to lead the session. Once a student has a clear understanding of the different types of responses, s/he will be able to ask for specific types of feedback which will make the author-led workshop more effective.

Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff's book *Sharing and Responding* describes the different ways readers can respond to a draft. The authors intended for their book to serve as a kind of supplemental textbook for a composition class. The book even begins with a letter to the students explaining how the book should be used.

The third edition of *Sharing and Responding,* published in 2000, starts with brief chapters listing the reasons why peer review is important and briefly describing the 11 types of responses included in the text. The majority of Elbow and Belanoff's book describes the 11 types of feedback in detail. For each type, the authors suggest when it should be used and how the author

should ask for it. To demonstrate how to use each type, Elbow and Belanoff include examples of the type of feedback used on the two student essays included in the book. Elbow and Belanoff used the same two example essays for every type of response so students could see the differences and similarities between each type. Also, since the same essays are used over and over, students can focus on the response example instead of the essay's content.

Elbow and Belanoff's *Sharing and Responding* and Kenneth Bruffee's *A Short Course in Writing* are both used as the theoretical foundation for Mara Holt's 1992 article "The Value of Written Peer Criticism." The method for peer revision that Holt promotes is a blend of activities from both sources. Holt borrows Elbow and Belanoff's "subjective response exercises" and combines them with Bruffee's descriptive outline and mediator role (389). Bruffee gives a detailed explanation of his descriptive outline in Part Three of his book *A Short Course in Writing*. Unlike "conventional topic or sentence outlines," descriptive outlines are written *after* the essay, not before it (Bruffee 153). Bruffee states that "descriptive outlines help [a student] become a constructive reader by making [her/him] more aware of what writers are doing when they write, as well as what they are saying" (152). Descriptive outlines also "reveal the parts of an essay that have to work smoothly in relation to each other" in order for the essay to be effective (Bruffee 152).

Holt states in her article that she prefers to use a blended model because "[she] [has] seldom had a completely successful class employing either method by itself. It is the conjunction of the two that has made the difference" (391). Holt makes a very important point: no one revision model is perfect. No model will work for every class or every student. Students should be introduced to multiple peer review models so they can find the one that works best for them; even if that model is one of their own creation that combines bits of other models.

Summary

The common theme throughout the literature is that readers' comments are necessary to the revision process. While there does not appear to be any unanimous opinion on which form and which reader is the most effective, the bottom line is that feedback is the driving force behind the revision process. This study adds to the current literature by analyzing how graduate assistant tutoring helps students make sense of the feedback they receive from the peers and professors.

Chapter 2: Description and Analysis of Graduate Assistant Position

Introduction

Tutoring has always been a passion of mine. I worked as a one-on-one tutor in the UW-Stevens Point Tutoring-Learning Center for five semesters as an undergraduate student. When I learned that the English department graduate assistant also provided one-on-one tutoring, I was eager to apply for the position. My time as the grad assistant, along with my Masters courses, made me realize I wanted to continue my studies and pursue a doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition. In my future studies, I would like to research how students can be taught to be more effective reviewers of both their papers and their peers' papers. Researching the role graduate assistant tutoring plays in student revision seemed like a logical first step.

Description of Graduate Assistant Position

Requirements & Expectations

The graduate assistant is selected by the English department chair. Grad assistants are chosen from the pool of English graduate students, most of whom are working on their Masters of Science in Teaching – English which is a two year program that combines education and English courses. According to Christopher P. Cirmo, Dean of the UW-Stevens Point College of Letters and Science:

> to be eligible for a graduate assistantship, [a student] must (a) be admitted as a graduate
> regular student pursuing an approved academic program, (b) be in and remain in good
> standing with a minimum 3.0 grade point average, and (c) be registered for at least four

credit hours per semester during the academic year or three credit hours during the summer session.

Students can apply for a semester or full year assistantship (Siclovan). Grad assistants may choose to renew their position for another academic year.

The graduate assistant is considered a part of the English department. She is given an office, telephone extension, and a mailbox; her name and contact information are included in the department directory. The grad assistant receives a contracted monthly salary for October through June of the academic year she is hired. When the position started, the graduate assistant was expected to put in 10 office hours a week each semester. Now, the graduate assistant must put in 20 hours per week each semester.

According to Dr. Michael Williams, Chair of the UW-Stevens Point English department, "most of the [graduate assistant's] time will be devoted to serving as a tutor for various students in our university [English] courses" (Williams). The majority of students who come in for tutoring are in freshmen-level English courses such as 101, 150, or 202 (formerly 102).

Dr. Williams also states that "from time to time [graduate assistants] may be asked to perform other support duties in the department in addition to [their] regular job as tutor." One example of a "support duty" is covering a class for a professor who is absent. Elizabeth Felt recalls covering a literature class during her semester as the grad assistant during spring 2005; she explained to the class how to outline an essay (Felt). Rebecca Lorenz-Schumacher, who served as the graduate assistant during the 2003-2004 school year, also covered a class and was asked to cover another one but didn't (Lorenz-Schumacher).

I have helped out professors who needed to be absent in a variety of ways. Because of my teaching background professors have felt comfortable allowing me to teach lessons and lead discussions when I cover their classes. One professor had me proctor an essay exam for his literature class. I also met with two sections worth of English 101 students for conferences in lieu of class during the week their professor was gone. The biggest contribution I made to support the English department beyond tutoring came during the spring semester last year. A professor needed extra time during the week for a crucial part of his dissertation research. I covered one of his teaching days for four weeks, so he could gather the data he needed.

However, these "support duties" are occasional occurrences; the bulk of a graduate assistant's time is spent tutoring. The UW-Stevens Point English department is different from other universities in that graduate assistants here do not teach classes. All freshmen level English classes at UWSP are taught by professors or academic staff members who have already earned their Masters degrees. My goal is to become a college professor, so I seized any opportunity to teach that I was offered.

Training

Students do not receive any specific formal training before starting the grad assistant position. Dr. Rebecca Stephens, the UW-Stevens Point Director of Freshmen English who supervises the grad assistants, gives a brief orientation which includes a tutorial on what to do in a session. Some past graduate assistants were also Reading/Writing tutors at the UW-Stevens Point Tutoring-Learning Center. Tutors employed by the Tutoring-Learning Center, or TLC, undergo a semester-long practicum to learn how to workshop student papers. Of the three former grad assistants who were interviewed, only one, Elizabeth Felt, had previous training from the

TLC. Rebecca Lorenz-Schumacher and Cheryl Brickner, who served as the grad assistant during the 2008-2009 school year, had no training before starting.

Reflections of Former Grad Assistants

Rebecca recalls having very few students during her year as graduate assistant. She figures "the whole year, I bet I had 5 [students]" (Lorenz-Schumacher). Rebecca believes the low turn-out was due to the fact that, at the time, grad assistant tutoring "just wasn't promoted" (Lorenz-Schumacher). She remembers being "busier at the beginning of the semester" which surprised us both (Lorenz-Schumacher). Unlike Rebecca, Cheryl remembers the semester starting out slowly and then picking up until she had about 3-5 students each week. Her busiest times were around mid-terms and final exams.

Both Rebecca and Cheryl said that the students who came in all had some kind of draft. What is interesting is that the students mainly wanted help with revising their papers. Cheryl stated that she did "all revision work," and Rebecca said her sessions involved "a lot [of] editing" (Brickner; Lorenz-Schumacher). Cheryl even commented that she did not remember a student coming in without a draft. The fact that students only sought help after they had a completed draft implies to me that these students saw the grad assistant's help as only applying to the revision stage. Another implication could be that the students felt as if they could handle drafting the paper by themselves, but when it came to revising the paper, they needed help.

Nancy Sommers comments on this attitude in her article "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." Sommers writes that most students think of writing as a linear rather than a recursive process, and "in these linear conceptions of the writing process

revision is understood as a separate stage at the end of the process – a stage that comes after the completion of a first or second draft and one that is temporally distinct from the prewriting and writing stages of the process" ("Revision" 378, emphasis mine). Sommers's article along with the comments of the former grad assistants lead me to think that because students consider revision a separate stage, they thought they had to come in with a complete draft. If they didn't have a complete draft, there would be nothing to revise which meant there would be nothing for the grad assistant to help them with.

Personal Description of My Role as Grad Assistant

In his article "Repetitive Strain: The Injuries of Responding to Student Writing," Gordon Harvey lists the many "roles we play in responding to student writing" (46). Since I'm not the one who created the assignment or who will ultimately grade it, I don't fit every role Harvey gives in his list. However, I still found myself identifying with several of the roles he listed.

"Editor and Corrector of Errors"

This is the role students are expecting me to play when they sign up to work with me. Almost every student who comes in has an error in mind that s/he wants me to "fix." This error could be anything from comma usage to citations. Many students come in after a conference with their professor or a peer review session, so they want my help fixing the errors their reviewer or professor pointed out to them. For students who come in more than once, we often start the session by discussing errors, or patterns of errors, we found in previous drafts. Students who come in more than once often comment on their personal progress in catching these errors on their own.

Students who are coming in for their first session will often make a blanket disclaimer, such as "I'm not good at English" or "I have never done this kind of paper before." I take these disclaimers to mean that they feel self-conscious about their writing and are convinced that they lack the skills to write a good paper. These students doubt their ability to identify their own errors; they have come in because they expect me to find the mistakes they missed.

But even though I know that my job is about more than policing their grammar, I still make a concentrated effort to explain that a semicolon only goes between two independent clauses and that a comma is needed after an introductory clause.

"Coach"

Harvey describes the "coach" role as "encouraging and exhorting, aware of where the essay has come from, how much effort the student has put in, what language is spoken in the student's home, and so on" (46). To me, this is the most important part of my job. Writing is personal. Even if the topic has no personal significance to the student, s/he still put time and effort into writing the essay. Whether a student means to or not, s/he will end up emotionally invested in her/his essay. In order to help students feel more comfortable sharing something that is so personal, I do my best to create a safe, open atmosphere in my office.

I see students on all ends of the spectrum: frustrated students who don't understand what their professor wants from them; timid students who barely make eye contact as I read their papers; overeager students who interrupt me as I read to make sure I understand their points. With each student, I try to match my delivery to meet his/her needs. I really experience the "coach" aspect of my position last fall when I worked with students in the English Education methods courses.

Students in the English Education methods courses are required to design an entire curriculum for a year-long course or two semester-long classes of their own creation. As part of this Course Unit Lesson Planning Activity, or CULPA as it is more commonly known in the department, students generate all the materials for their hypothetical course from course goals to daily lessons plans for a six-week unit. The CULPA is one of the most arduous projects an English Education major completes, and while every student struggles at some point during the project, some students become overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do. Since I went through the English Education methods courses and completed my own CULPA, the professors who teach the methods courses refer their students who are really struggling to me.

Last fall, I worked with a student who had fallen behind and was having trouble catching up. Personal issues such as work and illness were making it difficult for her to make any progress. The student was starting to feel as if she were going nowhere, and she had the added stress of needing to finish her CULPA on time or she wouldn't be able to student teach in the spring. This student would come in every week after a two and a half hour class always looking like the weight of the world was on her shoulders. After the first few sessions, it became obvious to me that in addition to helping her get caught up, my goal was also to get her to keep revising a project that she was clearly tired of working on.

To keep her motivated, I told her stories of my frustrations working on the CULPA, including the time I printed the whole project only to realize I had missed a section. I shared ideas that had helped me get through. I also made as many positive comments about her work each week as I possibly could while still being sincere in an attempt to balance all the suggestions for improvement she received from her professors. Towards the end of the semester, when she was sick of working on it, I reminded her that once her CULPA was done, she would

be able to student teach. She was really excited about student teaching, so I encouraged her to think about that whenever the CULPA was too much to handle.

"Fellow Writer"

Another of Harvey's roles that I fill is the "fellow writer, who faces the very same compositional challenges" (46). I have found that this role helps me the most when I am trying to connect with the students. Some students come in with the assumption that since I'm a graduate student who is employed by the university, I must be a perfect writer; at the very least they assume that writing comes easily for me. I usually forget about this assumption until a student jumps to defend his/her writing – not because s/he doesn't want to make changes, but because s/he assumes I think s/he is dumb for not making these changes already. Reminding the student that I struggle with writing, too, can go a long way in helping to ease the tension. I often share a quick example of my own frustrations with reaching a page limit or coming up with a thesis statement. Students feel more comfortable coming to me with problems once they realize I'm not going to judge them.

One of the students who has met with me multiple times and is a non-native speaker probably sums up how I want other students to feel about my status as a fellow writer. The student commented that he had originally assumed that academic writing came easily to all American college students, but he quickly realized how untrue this assumption was. He now understands that many native speakers struggle just as much as he does. My goal is for all the students who come to realize that writing is just as much work for me as it is for them. Granted, I may enjoy this work more than many of them do, but that doesn't make it any less challenging.

"Mediator"

In my opinion, the label that best describes my position is Kenneth Bruffee's "mediator." The mediator in Bruffee's model for revision is the person who reads the draft after it has been read by a peer reviewer. This third reader serves as a mediator by negotiating between the peer reviewer's comments and the author's reaction to these comments. Most often the students come to me with a draft that has been read by either their professor or a peer (or in some cases, by both). However, that doesn't mean that the student understands or agrees with the suggestions the other readers made. For example, I met with a student writer who had an issue with her first essay, so she hypercorrected this issue while writing her second essay. In the first essay, she analyzed a Sylvia Plath poem that involved both animals and people, so her professor commented that she make distinctions between humans and non-humans in her essay. The student didn't understand the reasoning behind the professor's suggestion so she felt it necessary to apply to her second literary analysis. However, the poem she analyzed for her second paper was only about people so there was no reason to make a distinction between humans and non-humans in this paper. In this student's case, I served as a mediator by explaining that not every suggestion a professor makes will apply to every paper.

Bruffee states that one of the mediator's jobs is to "explain where you agree or disagree with the first peer reviewer" (187). I notice that often when a student and I are reading through a draft that a professor or peer reviewer has read, the student will mention specific changes their first reader suggested. When the change was suggested by a professor, the student is usually looking for an explanation of why the change was necessary and how to apply it. On the other hand, if the change was suggested by another student, the author is usually looking for confirmation that the change is necessary.

In her article "Across the Drafts," Nancy Sommers alludes to the importance of the "mediator" role when she jokingly claims that students need "a decoding ring to determine whether the [professor's] check marks and squiggles are a good or bad thing" (249). Students come to me to interpret the comments professors have written on their drafts. A student recently came in with an essay covered in green ink. Although the student was able to use the comments to recognize what she had done wrong, she could not understand why she was wrong. For example, she had used two different tenses in the same sentence, so the professor circled both verbs, drew a line connecting them and wrote "tense" in the margin. These marks made it possible for the student to understand that she had done something wrong, but she did not understand how to fix it. She needed me to help her figure out which tense was the correct one to use and why it is important to keep her verb tenses consistent. The student had also made several errors in comma usage which her professor pointed out by either crossing them out or inserting commas for her. The student did not have a solid understanding of comma usage rules, so she didn't know the reasons why a comma was or wasn't needed in a certain spot. During our session, we went through each sentence with a comma error and we talked about the rule that applied to that specific error. For example, she had included an appositive in one sentence but didn't set it off with commas. I started by explaining what an appositive was and that we put commas around an appositive to signal to the reader that it is nonessential information included for clarification.

Another example of a time I served as a "decoder ring"/mediator happened during the middle of this spring semester. Abigail[1] came in on her third visit with the rough draft of a speculative cause-effect essay. She had never written this kind of essay before so she didn't

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[1] Survey participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities as part of IRB Human Subject Research requirements.

understand how it differed stylistically from a regular cause-effect essay. During their conference, her professor had told her to make the essay more speculative by changing her thesis from a statement into a question and by including more questions in the body paragraphs. The professor also wanted her to make the essay more "conversational." Unfortunately, Abigail took these suggestions to mean that she had to completely rewrite her paper, which she had already put a lot of effort into, so she was quite upset by the time she met with me.

As we read through her essay, I was able to make her see that the majority of the draft could be kept as it was. We found that her paper could easily be made more conversational by changing the language she used in her examples: "American culture" became "our culture," and the word "society," which occurred several times in the body paragraphs, was replaced with "we" and "us." She also realized that her professor did not think that her thesis statement needed to be taken out; the professor simply wanted Abigail to word it differently. A question is a more appropriate form for the thesis in a speculative essay because a writer is dealing with assumptions rather than facts.

Addition Strategies

In her article "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Nancy Sommers states that "what [student writers] lack, however, is a set of strategies to help them identify the 'something larger' that they sensed was wrong and work from there" (383). In other words, most students can recognize that their draft isn't "good enough," but they don't know exactly what to do to improve their writing. Meeting with me helps make up for this lack of strategies. For example, when I read a draft out loud, I always stop after sentences that confuse me or are difficult to read. Rarely do I stop in a place that surprises the students. More

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often than not, as soon as I stop reading the student will comment that they knew something wasn't right with the passage. They might say that they thought the sentence was too wordy or confusing but they didn't know "how else to say it."

Elbow and Belanoff also write about the benefits of reading a draft out loud in the chapter "Procedures for Giving and Receiving Responses" of their book *Sharing and Responding*. In the section "About Reading Out Loud," the authors state that "when someone reads a piece of writing out loud, that in itself constitutes feedback: it reveals a great deal about what the reader sees as the meaning, emphasis, implications, and voice or tone of the piece" (Elbow and Belanoff *Sharing* 13). When students listen to me read their papers out loud, they notice when the words on the page do not match the words they had in their head. They hear how repetitive, confusing, or vague a sentence really sounds. Other times they realize that a section which seemed relevant to them is actually not connected to their topic at all. Hearing his draft read aloud was what it took to make one student realize he had written a run-on sentence. He commented that he knew the sentence must be too long because I had to stop to take a breath while reading it.

Recently a student came in for help on a research paper. His paper did not meet the minimum page requirements, but he had no idea what he could add to make it longer. When I read the paper out loud, he noticed that I was having trouble understanding the main points of his argument. The examples that made perfect sense to him were difficult to understand for a person who had not done the same amount of background research that he had.

Reading the paper out loud also helps students understand the overall tone of their essay and, most importantly, if they are staying on topic. Jared, a student who has come in multiple times this academic year, has become more aware of the tone of his papers since he started

meeting with me. In his survey, Jared writes "at the start of the year I ranted in my essays, and had many fragments. After visiting a tutor though I have eliminated [these] mistakes in my essays."

Summary

The graduate assistant for the UW-Stevens Point English Department plays an important part in the revision process of undergraduate students. Because each student has specific needs, the grad assistant has to fill many different roles in order to address each student's concerns. The grad assistant is most often needed to mediate between the writer's opinions and the suggestions given by the peer reviewers and/or professors.

Chapter 3: Research Question, Methodology & Results

Introduction

The students who come to see me early in the semester (and by early I mean any time *before* the final assignment of the semester) usually come back to see me. Rarely do they do so against their will. Even if they were sent to me by a professor the first time, the second time they come on their own accord.

I know that I am a skilled tutor and I assume my tutoring skills are why the students come back. However, students are busy and there are other sources students could turn to for help. Most professors include peer review days and offer students opportunities to conference with them. For students who are willing to make an extra effort, there is the UW-Stevens Point Tutoring-Learning Center (TLC) located in the basement of the library. According the TLC website, "All UWSP students can receive [free] writing, reading, and study strategies consultations at the Tutoring-Learning Center" (Tutoring-Learning Center). The TLC employs fifty-four trained and qualified student Reading/Writing Consultants and is open Monday through Friday (Kratwell). In contrast, there is only one English graduate assistant, and I am available only twenty hours a week Wednesday through Friday.

I wanted to learn more about why students choose to see me multiple times, to better understand the students' perception of my role in their writing process. Are they coming back because they notice the sessions are helping? Is there something specific about me and/or my position that makes them more comfortable coming to me over someone else?

The idea for my research occurred to me when two students came in days apart asking for help because their peer reviewer had not given them any suggestions for improvement. While I worked with these students, I realized that their papers weren't bad, but there were areas that could be improved. These sessions got me thinking about peer review sessions and the part they play in revision and whether or not they play this part effectively. Teachers always encourage students to have another person look at their drafts. Many professors set aside specific class days for peer reviews and/or conferences. However, if the peer review sessions aren't providing anything helpful, what is the point of having them?

This question about the effectiveness of peer review sessions was the first piece of the puzzle that was my thesis topic. Once I started thinking about the students who came to me as a replacement for a peer review, I couldn't stop thinking about my sessions in relation to students' revisions. I remembered students who would comment as I read aloud a paragraph or sentence that they knew something wasn't right with it, but they couldn't figure out how to fix it.

I realized that students were coming to me because other methods (peer review, self-check) weren't giving them what they needed. This realization led me to wonder what it was about my sessions that made students turn to me for help. I always have at least a few students every semester who come to see me multiple times. I wanted to know why these students kept coming back. I assumed the students came back because I am a good tutor and because our sessions were improving their writing skills, but I wanted to know *their* reasons. Were they seeing the same progress I was seeing or were they just coming back to get a good grade? Was I

a helpful resource in their eyes? Did they notice the attention to detail that I put into answering their questions? Was that the reason they came back?

Methodology

Surveys

After meeting with my thesis advisor, I decided that the best way to learn more about why students come in would be to ask them. First I decided I would focus on the students who came in for multiple sessions during a semester. My reasoning behind this choice was that students who came in repeatedly would be able to tell me why they kept coming back. I also felt that it be would be easier to track the progress of students who came in repeatedly. Lastly, I felt that students who had met with me several times trusted me enough to feel comfortable answering my questions.

Next, I decided to use a survey so I would have written responses, but I wasn't sure what type of survey to use. I could have students answer open-ended questions, or I could write specific statements and have the students respond using an agree-disagree format. I chose to use open-ended questions because I was looking for their individual responses. I wanted to use their language, not mine. I didn't feel that calculating how many students "strongly agreed" with a statement was going to give the insights I was seeking.

I made up a list of seven questions. I tried to keep the list of questions brief because I was concerned that a long questionnaire would make students feel rushed and they would write shorter answers in order to get through all the questions. It was my hope that with fewer

questions, they would take the time to write more in-depth answers. My original goal was five, but I found that five questions weren't enough to address all the topics I wanted students to consider and respond to. I didn't include any demographic questions because my goal wasn't to describe *who* came in, but *why* they came in.

The first question, the only remotely demographic one, asked students how they had heard about graduate assistant tutoring. The response to this question showed me that, unlike with past grad assistants, grad assistant tutoring was being well-promoted within the English department. The majority of questions asked students to describe the session and what they brought in for us to work on. The final (and in my mind most important) question asked the students if they "noticed any changes/improvements in [their] writing" as a result of coming in for help. A sample of the survey is included in the appendix.

Students

Since I wanted to know the reasons why students came in multiple times, I asked only those students who came in at least twice to fill out the survey. Eleven students filled out the survey. Most students filled it out on their third visit of the semester. Three students were given the survey after their second session, so that I might gather more data. When I felt as if the number of surveys was picking back up, I began to hold off until the third session again. The last student I asked to fill out a survey after only two sessions was a student in English 150. I asked her early instead of waiting because I wanted to get as many responses from English 150 students as possible; not many 150 students come in for sessions. One student did not fill out the survey until his fourth visit because of scheduling conflicts. He needed to leave as soon as his third session ended in order to be at his class on time. I did not want the survey to leave my

office and I knew he was coming in later that week for another session, so I decided to give him the survey the next time I saw him.

I waited until the end of the each session to ask the student to complete the survey, so no one would feel "required" to do it in order to get their paper looked at. After a brief explanation of the reason why I was interested in their responses and how to fill in the questionnaire, I gave them the questionnaire and a copy of the informed consent form. Then I left the office to give the student privacy. Some students did choose to step into the office next to mine, so they could be alone without forcing me to leave my office. Before leaving, I stressed that the student should not write his/her name on the questionnaire in order to maintain confidentiality. Only one student asked to talk to me while filling out the questionnaire; she was a non-native speaker and needed clarification about the wording of a question. At the top of each completed questionnaire, I recorded the date and what number session this was for the student.

Results

Of the eleven students surveyed, seven students stated that they heard about graduate assistant tutoring from their English professor, and one student wrote that he heard about it in his English class. Two students wrote that they heard about grad assistant tutoring from me; I came to one student's English 150 class and told them about tutoring. I told the other student about grad assistant tutoring after a session in the Tutoring-Learning Center. The last student wrote that she was referred to me by the Tutoring-Learning Center.

In their responses to the third question, every student gave a specific reason for coming in. The majority of students (9) listed at least one specific aspect of their paper that they wanted

help with; many of them listed more than one aspect. The aspect listed most was "grammar" followed by proofreading/cleaning up the paper. One student, Steven, filled out the survey after a session that focused on starting a paper. He wrote "I wanted to get a jump on my very important I-search and to [gain] more ideas so that [I] could start right away." The most unique, and detailed, response came from a student named Brooke. Brooke explained that she intends to transfer to Madison after this year; she came in for "help in becoming a better writer" so she will have the GPA she needs "to go to [her] dream school."

The fourth questions asked students what type(s) of assignments they brought in for their session. All eleven students answered that they bring writing assignments to work on. Some of the specific assignments given include literary analysis, research papers, and journal responses. Abigail wrote that, in addition to her essay, she also brought in her works cited page.

For question five, students were supposed to write the specific areas we focused on during the session. Five of the eleven students simply restated the response they had for question three. Barbara, a non-traditional student who is also a non-native speaker, gave the most detailed response. She listed five specific grammatical areas we worked on together.

Question six asked students if they applied the suggestions given in the sessions. Eight students said yes, two students wrote "usually" and one student, Lucy, wrote that she applied "almost all" the changes. When asked to give their reason(s) for applying the suggestions, three students responded that they found the suggestions "helpful." Jared, a student who attended multiple sessions throughout the year, wrote "usually I apply the suggestions given because I feel it[sic] enhances my essay."

In answer to question seven, ten of the eleven students reported that they have noticed changes/improvements in their writing since coming in for grad assistant tutoring. Question seven was initially the most frustrating for me because it didn't seem that students were reflecting on their writing as a whole. Instead, it seemed that they were only repeating what we had worked on during that session. However, as I collected more surveys, I noticed the responses began to show the level of reflection for which I was hoping.

Analysis

"Criterion-Based Feedback"

One element that all the sessions have in common is that students come in with at least a vague idea of what they want accomplished, or as I worded it in my survey, what they "want help with." Some students even come in with specific instructions, given by the professor, of what they need to revise. In their book *Sharing and Responding*, Elbow and Belanoff refer to this type of session as "criterion-based feedback" (10).

Criterion-based feedback is the kind students are most often expecting. Their goal is to improve their paper to get the best grade possible. To achieve this goal, they need to know if they are meeting their professor's expectations. Elbow and Belanoff define "criterion-based feedback" as "[asking] readers to give you their thoughts about specific criteria that you are wondering about or struggling with" (*Sharing* 10).

When students come in they always start with a brief explanation of the assignment. Most students show me the assignment sheet outlining the requirements so I can read exactly what the

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professor is expecting. Also, many times students will have specific criteria of their own. For example, non-native speakers come in asking me to check their grammar; they want to make their paper sound more natural, more like a native speaker wrote it. Native speakers, traditional and non-traditional, also ask for help with their grammar, but their main concerns are usually related to comma usage. The "criteria" students are most often concerned about, especially when writing a research paper, are their works cited page and their in-text citations.

Elbow and Belanoff also state that criterion-based feedback "depends on skilled and experienced readers" (11). Students come to me for help because they know I know what I'm doing. Ella, an English 150 student, wrote in her survey that she incorporates my suggestions because "Kate is much more skilled in the art of writing; her knowledge exceeds mine."

Students also know that I will be honest with them. If I don't know the rule off the top of my head, I will look it up in the handbook. If I'm not sure if the professor will agree with my suggestions, I tell the students and recommend they double check with their professors.

I always refer students back to the professor whenever I am unsure about a stylistic suggestion because, as Walter Lamberg writes in "Self-Provided and Peer-Provided Feedback," "the teacher decides on the skills and qualities to stress in assignments, by considering the goals of the course and the types of writing to be covered" (67). Recently I had several students come in to work on a research paper; these students all had English 202 with the same professor. English 202 is one of the composition classes required for graduation along with English 101. 101 and 202 are all about introducing students to college writing; in 202 the focus is on argumentative writing. For this assignment, students were expected to include quotes; some students had incorporated their quotes without using signal phrases. I personally felt that the

signal phrases were not needed because the quotes were still well introduced. However, since 202 is all about gaining the skills of academic writing, I assumed the professor would be expecting signal phrases for every quote. I told the students that their sentences were well-written, but I also recommended that they include the signal phrases or double check with their professor to see if she would accept the quotes without the phrases.

"New Eyes"

In their book *Being a Writer: A Community of Writers Revisited*, Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff state that "there are two principal resources for good revision: time and new eyes" (129). The authors recommend that students "put [a draft] aside for a while and do [their] serious reviewing after a week or more has passed" (Elbow and Belanoff *Being a Writer* 129). Unfortunately, important though it may be to the revision process, time is the one resource students always seem to be lacking. Even students who make academics their number one priority still run out of time to get everything done. Other obligations, such as work, family or other classes, prevent students from devoting all of their time to writing their English papers. Most students compensate for their lack of time by turning to the other "principal resource" Elbow and Belanoff mention: "new eyes" (*Being a Writer* 129). According to the authors, "the best source of new eyes is other people" (*Being a Writer* 129).

Students commented in their surveys that a new perspective was their reason for coming in. Jonathan, an English 150 student, wrote that he comes in for tutoring because "it is good to have someone else read a paper for clarification issues." Our sessions have helped Jonathan realize the important role "new eyes" play in revision. He wrote in his survey that "I now tend to

step back and read my paper as if I knew nothing about it before. [This technique] has helped with clarification problems."

Another student, Abigail from English 202, wrote that these sessions have taught her "how to look at a paper differently." This student is an example of how "new eyes" can be needed before writing even begins. The first time this student came to see me she was having trouble forming the thesis statement for her essay. She had researched two different areas of a topic and wanted to make sure she mentioned them both in her thesis. However, she couldn't think of a way to connect them other than writing "this essay is about (area 1) and (area 2)" because that was the type of thesis statement she was used to writing. I suggested she create a thesis that previewed her main points in a more general way rather than specifically listing each main point. After our discussion, Abigail was able to move past the thesis template she had trapped herself in. The new thesis she drafted still introduced her main points but felt less similar to a thesis found in a high school research paper.

Extra Attention

Elbow and Belanoff write in their chapter "Procedures for Giving and Receiving Responses" that "it's crucial sometimes to take the time for extended and careful response – perhaps in writing – from at least one or two readers" (14).

"More and Better Comments"

Mary, a non-traditional student who is also a non-native speaker, stated in her survey that after our sessions, she has a better understanding of "the reason[s] for using a specific punctuation and where to place certain words." This particular student is a non-native speaker whose goal is to become as fluent as possible in regards to her writing. She makes a point to ask

for an explanation when I suggest a change she either doesn't understand or did not realize was necessary to make. Jason, an international student who has attended multiple sessions last year and this year, always asks for the reasoning behind the changes we make. One time when I was helping Jason with his grammar, I told him he should replace "since" with "because." However, it wasn't enough to just make the suggestion; he wanted to know why "because" was the more appropriate word in that context. Later in the session, when we read a sentence where he used "since" correctly, he wanted to know why "since" was correct in that sentence.

Due to the extreme attention to detail involved, sessions with these two students could last at least an hour, sometimes longer; most professors don't have that kind of time to devote to every stage or every paper. Sommers writes in "Across the Drafts" that she and her fellow researchers "wondered – would more or better comments have made a difference to these stalled writers?" (249). I believe that professors are experiencing a similar thought when they refer students to me. The professors know I can take the time to focus on the smallest details and to explain why specific changes needed to be made.

At the end of the 2012 fall semester, a professor told several of his students that they had to meet with me before turning in their final paper. While the professor had been able to do a general overview of the paper, he knew these specific students needed more attention than his schedule would allow. With each of five students who came in, I did a close reading of their papers for citation and and/or grammatical errors. Since I had the luxury of time, I could stop at each usage error and explain how to properly use a comma and/or semi-colon. Stopping at each error helped the students recognize patterns of mistakes they were making, and receiving an explanation, I hope, helped prevent usage errors in future drafts. For students who were having

trouble with citation formats, I was able to use the freshmen writing handbook *Rules for Writers* and walk them through the different citation formats step-by-step.

Another, more recent, example of a student needing extra attention would be Laura, a student I have been working with since March of this semester. Laura met with her professor about revising a response paper for her literary theory class. The professor had felt that Laura's paper was unclear; she was having a hard time understanding the point Laura was trying to make. They had a conference to discuss what needed to be changed, but there wasn't enough time for them to go through the paper in detail. The professor made some suggestions for global revisions, but Laura really needed someone to walk her through the changes – explaining why each one was necessary – before she felt comfortable making them.

"Before and Between, Not Just at the End"

"That students might find comments useful through the process – before and between drafts, not just at the end – will also not surprise us" (Sommers "Drafts" 249). Whenever I go into a classroom to promote grad tutoring, one of the points I stress the most is that students can meet with me at any point during the writing process. I want students to realize that I can do more for them than proofreading. Students who struggle with writing, especially international students or students whose first language is not English, will often make an effort to meet with me throughout the drafting process. Last spring Jason came to me before a paper had even officially been assigned to make sure he understood what the essay required and to discussion possible topics. Lucy, an international student in English 101**,** came to me for helping writing the introduction for her illustrative essay. Lucy stated in her survey that she came in "because I was totally lost [as to how] to start the essay."

However, non-native speakers are not the only students who benefit from coming in early. Over the last two years, I have worked with a few native speakers, traditional and non-traditional, who have come in early because they were struggling. Abigail has come in twice this semester for help finding sources for two different papers. She wrote in her survey that she comes in because "[Kate] takes the time to help as much as possible." Abigail transferred to UW-Stevens Point from another school in the UW system, so she is not used to the UWSP library database. She mostly uses EBSCOHost for her searches because she used that database at her other university. However, even using a familiar database, she still runs into the same probably many students face: her search resulted in far too many hits for her to sift through. Abigail was able to recognize that she could benefit from coming for help even though she hadn't written anything yet.

Another student came in this semester because he felt that he wasn't "good at English" so he had doubts about how to handle his research paper. The student's main concerns were how to find credible sources and how to handle the biases inherent in those sources. This student greatly benefited from having someone to talk to while he searched for sources. He was able to ask questions throughout the process and get immediate answers which left him feeling more confident about how to handle his sources. Getting his questions answered before he started drafting saved him the frustration of writing a draft and then learning he did something wrong.

Summary

Eleven students who came in multiple times this semester completed surveys that asked them to describe their graduate assistant tutoring sessions. These students reported that they use grad assistant tutoring because they want help revising their writing assignments. All eleven students

stated that they apply at least some of the suggestions they receive during their sessions. From my own observations, I realized that students also come in for grad assistant tutoring for a new perspective and for extra attention.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, Implications of the Study & Future Research

Conclusions

When I started my research I was wondering why students were coming to me for help and, more importantly, why some students kept coming back. What role was I playing in their writing process? What need was I satisfying?

As I stated in Chapter 2, the UW-Stevens Point Tutoring-Learning Center (TLC) is another place students can go for help with their papers. Given the number of students on campus, it is obvious that some of them have chosen to use the TLC rather than grad assistant tutoring. However, there are students who have clearly made me their first choice for help with their papers.

Consistent Advice

One student's survey response gave me an insight into my question. When I first met Mary, the non-traditional student who is also a non-native speaker, I was working in the TLC. We did not have time to read her whole paper before the TLC closed, so I suggested she come back to my office and we finish there during my office hours. Now, she seems to prefer to bring her English papers to my office instead of working on them at the TLC. In response to the question "Why have you come in multiple times?" Mary wrote "it is best to stick with the same tutor. I found out the more tutor [sic] you have the more confusing it is for the person who is seeking help." By choosing grad assistant tutoring every time, Mary guarantees she will get consistent advice. Also, she won't have to waste time each session explaining the difficulties with writing she has. We are able to get straight to work and we can carry information over from session to session.

Human Connection

I thought that the question "have you noticed any changes/improvements in your writing since you started coming in?" was going to be the best source of reasons for why students came back in. However, after reading through the surveys, I have found that the question "why have you come in multiple times?" has provided me with more specific answers, and these more specific answers have led to a better understanding of their reasons.

When I started this project, I thought that improvements in their writing would be the reason for repeated visits. This was one of the reasons I made the question about improvements the last question on the survey: I thought it was the most important one. After reading through the surveys and looking back on the sessions, I realized I might have missed an even more important aspect of the grad assistant tutoring. Many of the descriptions from the research that I have used to describe my role ("coach," "mediator," "new eyes") speak to the importance of the human interaction in tutoring.

Obviously students want their papers corrected, but sometimes they also just want to talk to a human being. Surprisingly, the extra time and extra attention I put into my sessions does not go unnoticed. A non-traditional student who came in multiple times last semester, would stop by my office to chat and tell me how "we" did on the most recent paper. He still smiles and greets me whenever we run into each other on campus. Other students who attended multiple sessions have stopped to catch up with me when we've crossed paths on campus. The most recent, and one of the most touching, examples of the connection students feel was when Steven brought in an essay we had revised because he wanted to show me that he had gotten an A. He was clearly proud of his grade and it was also evident that he viewed it as a joint accomplishment.

Students recognize that I am a skilled tutor; I believe that my skill level is one of their main reasons for coming to their first session. However, I think a reason they come back is because they also realize how invested I am in their success. Because of the way the grad assistant tutoring is set up, I have ample time to really get to know the students who come to see me. Not every student who comes in is looking for this kind of connection; some students come in to get their paper corrected and then they are done with me. But the students who need extra attention, in addition to what their professors provide, appreciate getting help on their papers from someone who can take extra time to establish a bond with them.

Implications for My Teaching

As stated in my chapter on the expectations of the graduate assistant position, my educational and professional goal is to continue my graduate studies and eventually become a university professor. When I start my doctoral program this fall at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, I will teach two sections of freshman composition as part of my graduate assistantship. My advisor here at UW-Stevens Point and I designed this research project with my career as a professor in mind.

"Intellectual Discourse in Writing"

Holt writes that she includes elements from both Bruffee's method and Elbow and Belanoff's method because "the use of both kinds of peer critique…challenges students to engage in intellectual discourse in writing" (392). Holt's statement about intellectual discourse caught my attention and inspired me to really think about the types of conversations that took place during my sessions. Upon reflection, I don't think there was as much give-and-take as

there could have been. Former grad assistant, Rebecca Lorenz-Schumacher, also commented that she felt her session "should have been more collaborative."

Whenever I had trouble coming up with a solution for a difficult part of in a student paper, I would tell the student what was causing me the most trouble. Then I would brainstorm solutions out loud, so the student could tell me which possibility s/he thought worked best for revising the essay. I will admit that I sometimes felt embarrassed when a student had an easier time coming up with a revision than I did. I was worried that the student would think I wasn't capable of helping her/him and would not come back. Now I realize that those moments were really opportunities to get the student more engaged in the revision process. In the future, when I am working one-on-one with my students, I will make an effort to keep the students engaged as we go through their drafts. It is so easy for students to zone out while someone else reads their paper, but participating in the revision process is one way to help them become better revisers.

Consistency

Mary's survey, along with the literature I read, showed me that one of the main reasons students came to see me was because they were looking for consistency. While it can be helpful to have multiple readers for one draft, it can also be confusing – and even frustrating – if the readers give conflicting advice. Elbow and Belanoff also stressed in *Sharing and Responding* that it is easier to build trust and rapport with just one or two people.

When I incorporate peer review into my composition classes, I think it would be best to assign students to specific revision groups. The biggest drawback to this idea, however, is deciding whether to match students by their writing ability or to create groups with mixed ability levels. I see the benefits of mixed ability groups, but I also understand that skilled writers may be

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hesitant to let their lesser skilled peers read their writing. Hopefully, incorporating activities that model what students are expected to do will make it possible for everyone to be on the same level when revising.

Scaffolding

A recurring idea throughout the reading was that students need to be taught how to act during a peer review session. Unfortunately, many teachers (myself included) assume that by the time students reach high school – and definitely by the time they enter college – they know what to do during a peer review session. In some cases, that is just not true. There are multiple reasons for this lack of skills. For example, some students may have never been taught what *specifically* to do. Other students (possibly most of them) were taught what to do but have forgotten either because they have been out of school for a few years or because peer review procedures weren't that important to them. Whatever the reason, students in freshmen-level composition courses need to be taught how to review a peer's draft.

The literature agrees that scaffolding and practice are keys to successful peer review sessions. Strang specifically states that the teacher needs to first model how student authors are expected to behave during the workshop. Students only start leading the workshop on their own until after they understand what they supposed to do. Elbow and Belanoff encourage students to try each of the different response types. Once students are comfortable with all of the response types, they will be able to choose the type that best suits their needs.

Suggestions for Future Research

In a thesis about revision, it seems only natural to comment on aspects I would change if given the chance to perform this research again.

Recording Data

I would be more scientific in the way I gathered my information. When I started my project, I wasn't very interested in accumulating numerical data. Now I can see the benefits of having this kind of data. A colleague suggested that I include the percentage of students who come in for more than one session. I honestly had no way to calculate this information. I always have a weekly sign-up sheet, but as soon as my notification emails have been sent out to the respective professors, the sign-up sheet is recycled. I have not kept any kind of record of a total or "average" number of students per semester. I have kept track of which professor has the most students visit in a week, but that statistic is more for fun than for research. I think knowing the actual number of students who come in during a given semester would prove (or disprove) that the majority of students I work with come in repeatedly.

Audio Recording Sessions

I would recommend audio recording the session because some students can explain their difficulties better when they talk about them. For this reason, the recordings might be a more accurate source than written surveys. Audio recordings are definitely a more accurate source than my memory which I was forced to pull from when I was analyzing the survey responses. Also, if multiple sessions with the same students are recorded, they could be compared. The researcher would be better able to notice trends or patterns from session to session or even from student to student. Audio recordings would also make it possible to get more precise quotes from the

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students and to pick up on words or phrases used repeatedly, either by the same student or multiple students. For example, I wish I would have been able to actually tally how many students claimed they weren't very good at English.

I didn't like the idea of recording sessions at first because I didn't want the students to feel uncomfortable or act any differently from the way they normally do. My biggest concern was that students would stop coming in because they didn't want to be recorded. When I was planning this research, I thought about taking notes after each session, but some days my schedule is so full, stopping after each session would put me behind. However, I regret not taking the time to write at least something down and I would recommend taking notes on the sessions during future research. It would be possible to look back at the end of the day, either on individual sessions or on the day as a whole. A form or log could be created to make it easier to keep track of the key points from each session during hectic days. I have kept the emails that I send to professors about my sessions with their students. I have referred back to them to help jog my memory of session from previous semesters.

Continuous Surveys and/or New Surveys

I asked students to fill out a only one survey. Even though most of the students continued to come in, I did not ask them to retake or update their survey. I think it would be a good idea to have a "follow-up" survey that students would take again after coming for another two or three sessions.

I think it would also be worthwhile to distinguish between students who had come in during previous semesters and students who had never come in before this semester. Students who had come in during previous semesters could possibly take a different survey that focuses

more on their motivations for coming back. In theory, students who have been on campus for more than one semester have had time to check out other academic resources. These students could be able to explain what it is about grad assistant tutoring that keeps them coming back in.

Another option would be to have students fill out a survey after their very first session. By following this procedure, every student would have a chance to participate in the data collection process. I think surveying every student after the first session could provide useful insights. For example, it would have been a good idea to survey the string of students who all came in for the English 202 research paper. Most of them had not met with me before the research paper was assigned nor did they come in again after it had been turned in. I assumed most of them came in because the professor had referred them to me or because they were concerned about their grade – the paper was worth a significant portion of their final grade. Looking back, I think it would be nice to know if they thought their session with me had any effect on their paper. The students who return later in the semester could retake the survey or fill out a completely different "follow-up" survey.

Closing Thoughts

There is still so much that could be researched in this area. As I pursue my doctorate, I want to continue to study how students can be taught to be more effective peer reviewers, especially in the classroom. I am glad that so many students have realized they can turn to other campus resources if their peer review sessions are ineffective. However, I want to help students get to the point that grad assistant tutoring is being used to supplement a peer review, not compensate for a peer reviewer's lack of suggestions.

Graduate Assistant Tutoring Research Questionnaire

Please take the time to answer the following questions about your tutoring sessions.

How did you hear about graduate assistant tutoring? (Did someone recommend you come here?)

How many times have you come in for tutoring? Why have you come in multiple times?

What was the motivation for you coming in today? (What did you "want help with"?)

What type(s) of assignment(s) did you bring in?

What specific areas did we focus on?

Did you apply the suggestions given? Why or why not?

Have you noticed any changes/improvement in your writing since you started coming in? If yes, please describe what you have noticed.

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