

OWCA Conference 2024

The Vital Writing Center: Evolution and Endurance

11-12 April 2024

The Online Writing Centers Association invites proposals for its third virtual conference. We encourage all writing center folk to participate, including writing center professionals, graduate students, and undergraduates.

Deadlines and Conference Timeline

- So You Want to Present at a Conference event - 22 September 2023
- Proposals - 15 October 2023
- Acceptances - 15 November 2023
- Conference Materials - March 2024

Call for Proposals

In an 1984 issue of *College English*, Stephen North laments the persistent misunderstanding of the writing center. He cites stories of faculty who send their students to have their paper “cleaned up” (433) or who see the writing center as a place for remedial writers only. Answering his own question of “what is the idea of a writing center” (237), North’s essay became a seminal text in writing center pedagogy.

Sixteen years later, Muriel Harris addresses the viability of the writing center in the twenty-first century. Her focus on the influence of technology, the push back against administrators who want to use commercial tutoring services, and the increase in multilingual students is her examination of what writing centers are, do, and have to offer. She concludes that “if we can accomplish all this...we’ll be vital” (21).

Echoing these explorations of the writing center world, in 2017, *Praxis* published an issue on “rethinking not only what the writing center does but also what the writing center is.” Five years later, a similar issue examined the writing center during times of “continued uncertainty, exhaustion, and fear” due to “racial, social, and political unrest” and the COVID-19 pandemic.

This enthusiasm to understand writing centers is also reflected in the breadth and depth of the research and questions seen in *Praxis* as well as in *The Writing Center Journal*, *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, *The Peer Review*, and the *wcenter* email listserv. From artificial intelligence to social justice advocacy to administrative logistics, writing center professionals continue to carve out their place in education.

And yet almost forty years after North, writing centers still face very similar criticisms. Even when trying to highlight Lori Salem’s quantitative approach to writing center research in 2018, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* instead turns her interview into “click bait” designed to incite controversy—a characterization rebuked by both Salem herself and Julia Bleakney in response.

It is thus not surprising to see these misinformed attitudes continue. Take for example the January 2023 *Chronicle of Higher Education* opinion piece by Blake Smith, a collegiate assistant professor in history at the University of Chicago. Smith insists that students who have been to the writing center “ought to demonstrate a guaranteed minimum level of writing ability” so that

instructors do not have “to explain, yet again, the purpose of topic sentences.” Considering this misunderstanding, he is predictably “appalled” at his institution’s writing tutor training syllabus, insults writing center scholarship as focused too much on oppression, and decides ultimately that the writing center has become useless.

With this in mind, the OWCA invites proposals for its third annual virtual conference focused on the evolution and endurance of the writing center. How can writing centers answer Salem’s call in her rebuttal to go further? How has the writing center evolved, and how does it continue to evolve? How does the writing center endure in the face of barriers, criticisms, and misunderstandings? **How do we become, to use Harris’s term, vital?**

Areas to Consider

Proposals for this theme may consider, but are not limited to, the following areas:

- **Administration:** Budgeting, institutional support, the writing center’s parent department, marketing and branding, physical location, etc.
- **Writing Center Staff:** Employment, contingency roles, staff professional development, graduate student professionalization, tutor hiring and training, emotional labor, etc.
- **Student Populations:** Overall enrollment, graduate v. undergraduate, STEM writing, multilingual writers, etc.
- **Diversity & Social Justice:** Marginalized groups, race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality, diversity, accessibility, access, etc.
- **Questions of Value:** Misconceptions of the writing center, skills transfer, the writing center and other academic support resources, student retention, writing center assessments, etc.
- **The 21st Century:** AI (ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc.), multimodality, online v. in person tutoring, synchronous v. asynchronous tutoring, pandemics and other major national or global events/crises, etc.
- **Online Writing Centers:** Administration, technology, barriers, populations served, synchronous v. asynchronous tutoring, etc.

References

- Bleakney, Julia. “Creating ‘click bait’ and sound bites to incite controversy”: A response to the CHE piece, “What’s Wrong With Writing Centers.”” [Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders](#), 4 March 2018.
- García, Romeo, and Anna Sicari. “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Have We Arrived Yet?” [Praxis: A Writing Center Journal](#), vol. 19, no. 1, 2022.
- Garner, James, and Alejandro Omidasalar. “From the Editors.” [Praxis: A Writing Center Journal](#), vol. 14, no. 2, 2017.
- Harris, Muriel. “Preparing to Sit at the Head Table: Maintaining Writing Center Viability in the Twenty-First Century.” [The Writing Center Journal](#), vol. 20, no. 2, 2000. JSTOR.
- Jacobs, Rose. “What’s Wrong With Writing Centers.” [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), 5 Feb. 2018.
- North, Stephen M. “The Idea of a Writing Center.” [College English](#), vol. 46, no. 5, 1984. JSTOR.
- Salem, Lori. “Writing-Center Researcher Says Views Were Mischaracterized” - Lori Salem’s response to CHE’s “What’s Wrong With Writing Centers.” [Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders](#), 20 Feb. 2018.
- Smith, Blake. “Opinion: Against the Writing Center.” [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), 3 Jan. 2022.
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Session Formats

The OWCA accepts proposals for the following session formats:

Asynchronous Formats

Asynchronous presenters will pre-record a presentation that will be available to attendees from 4 April 2024 through 30 June 2024. After this date, presenters can choose for their recording to be deleted from the OWCA website or to be moved to our [public scholarship database](#).

Asynchronous presentations should be a maximum of 10 minutes in length. These sessions are ideal for:

- Presenting research that explores a specific topic, question, or collected data.
- Showcasing a particular technology or program helpful to writing center work.
- Outlining a technique or approach used in your writing center.

All asynchronous presenters will also be offered the opportunity to share or discuss their work live during the conference on 11-12 April 2024.

Synchronous Formats

Synchronous sessions highlight participation through interactive conversations or activities that provide explicit opportunities for attendees to discuss, share, and/or create. Synchronous sessions can be in one of the following formats:

- **General Workshop:** An interactive session that briefly introduces a topic then invites participation in activities to apply concepts or develop new materials.
- **Roundtable Discussion:** A collaborative conversation in which attendees are led by a moderator guiding the discussion through specific questions or prompts.
- **Research Networking:** A session that allows participants to share works-in-progress, create connections for collaboration, or seek feedback on current research projects.
- **Professionalization Forums:** An opportunity to present best practices in professional skills (job applications, interviewing, etc.) or to provide advice to those entering the writing center job market.

Synchronous sessions will run for 45 or 75 minutes on 11-12 April 2024.

Accessibility

The OWCA requires presenters and facilitators to share accessible materials for their session prior to the actual conference dates. These materials are necessary to fulfill OWCA's commitment to accessible, equitable, and inclusive interaction. The OWCA reserves the right to edit presentation materials for digital accessibility.

Asynchronous presenters will need to share the following materials:

- **Slide decks or other materials used in the recording by 3/15/24.** Presenters who are using slide decks must provide the slides as a PowerPoint (PPT) file. Other files should be shared as Microsoft Word documents. These files will be available to attendees.

- **Session recording and closed captions by 4/1/24.** Presenters who propose an asynchronous presentation will record their presentation and upload it to YouTube. We recommend setting your video privacy setting to "unlisted" and turning off comments and ratings. Presenters will be asked to edit the closed captions on their video for accuracy before sending the YouTube link to the OWCA. For assistance, use these resources on [How to make a YouTube video unlisted](#) and [How to add closed captions in YouTube](#).
- **Handouts [if applicable] by 4/1/24.** Presenters who plan to share handouts must provide these files as Microsoft Word documents to the OWCA.

Synchronous facilitators will need to share the following materials by 4/1/24:

- **Detailed outline:** Facilitators should prepare a detailed outline that includes any scripted portions of the session, outlines the major topics and the order of activities, and includes directions for any activity and/or the specific discussion questions being put forward.
- **Slide decks [if applicable]:** Facilitators who are using slide decks must provide the slides as a PowerPoint (PPT) file to the OWCA to be available to attendees.
- **Handouts [if applicable]:** Facilitators who plan to distribute handouts must provide these files as Microsoft Word documents to the OWCA. We recommend a handout if you plan to utilize Zoom breakout rooms to support smaller group conversations.

In order to support presenters and facilitators in developing accessible materials, the OWCA will provide the following:

- A pop-up event on making your conference materials accessible will be offered in early March (co-hosted by OWCA's Accessibility and Virtual Events Committees).
- Training materials, guides, and support to help presenters develop accessible presentation materials. Please visit [OWCA's Accessibility Resources page](#).
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in all synchronous sessions. The OWCA works with [Morr Interpreting](#) for ASL interpretation.
- Recordings of all synchronous sessions and their ASL interpretation
- Edited closed captions for all synchronous video recordings.

If you plan to present or attend and we have not appropriately planned for your accessibility needs, please email the OWCA Accessibility Committee at access@onlinewritingcenters.org.

Registration

An OWCA membership is required to present and/or attend OWCA 2024 as well as to access conference materials. One-year OWCA memberships are \$5-15 for students and \$40 for professionals. Learn more about [OWCA membership dues and benefits](#).

Submit a Proposal

Conference proposals are due on **1 October 2023**. After initial review of proposals, there will be an opportunity to revise and resubmit the proposal based on feedback from the conference committee. Submissions must include the following:

- All presenter name(s), role(s), institution(s), and email(s)

- Working title
- Session format and the reasoning for this particular format
- Topic category or categories
- An abstract in written (about 500 words) or audio/video (5 minutes or less) format

Learn more about submitting your proposal on [OWCA's Conference page](#) or jump directly to the [OWCA Conference 2024 Proposal Submission form](#).

Proposal Scoring Rubric

Conference proposals will be scored using the following rubric:

- **Is the focus of the proposal clear and innovative? (scale of 1-4)**
 - 1 = unclear topic; replicates previous contributions
 - 4 = clear topic; proposes new idea; draws new connections or conclusions
- **Would this proposal contribute to varied perspectives and interpretations of the conference theme and writing center work? (scale of 1-4)**
 - 1 = irrelevant to writing centers; irrelevant to the conference theme
 - 4 = exceptionally meaningful to writing centers; compellingly responds to conference theme
- **Is the proposal already situated in an existing body of research or does the proposal have the potential to be situated in an existing body of research?**
 - Yes _____
 - Somewhat _____
 - No _____
- **Does the proposal address diversity/inclusivity and/or offer a perspective from an underrepresented group or institution?**
 - Yes _____
 - Somewhat _____
 - No _____
- **For synchronous sessions only: Does the proposed session provide opportunity for active participation of attendees?**
 - Yes _____
 - Somewhat _____
 - No _____
- **Would you recommend we accept the proposal?**
 - Yes
 - Invite to revise and resubmit
 - No