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Old Buildings have Old Drafts

This is a reflection of my experiences as a tutor at the Utah State University Writing Center in comparison with my time at the Dixie State University Writing Center. Although both have provided opportunities for me to learn and practice pedagogy as well as improve my own writing, both have also provided entirely different experiences and atmospheres. The physical differences between the buildings and the departments that house each writing center are reflective of the processes emphasized in their instruction of writing. Consequently, they impact the way that students view the writing process and the role of the Writing Center, and have influenced my view of my role as both a tutor and as a teacher.

Keywords: Writing Center, revision, drafting, process, collaboration

Old Buildings have Old Drafts

The Utah State Writing Center is a cozy environment. The entirety of Ray B. West has a very lived-in feel. The building isn't new, and it doesn't have all the bells and whistles of some of the newer buildings on campus. However, there is charm and a certain comfort in the creaky floors, the mish-mash of tiles and carpeting, and the juxtaposition of the old, ornate banisters with the bright paint on the walls. As I descend into the basement towards the USU Writing Center, I feel companionship in knowing that I am only one of many English students who have walked through the halls and wiled away hours in the classrooms and offices within.

Ray B. West's familiarity continues into the Writing Center's space. The small reception room is always filled with at least one smiling face, but usually there are several tutors and students sitting in the chairs around the perimeter, chatting and laughing while waiting for sessions to begin. Cubbies and stacks of paper clutter the walls and desks, but this only serves to give the small space a comfortably busy feel.

USU's Writing Center was a shift for me, as I came from Dixie State University's Writing Center, which is on the fourth floor of the Holland Centennial Commons—an enormous, modern building, with floor-to-ceiling windows marching from corner to corner and meticulously decorated with a color scheme of unassuming grays and deep red. Everything about the building is sanitized and open air. There are no areas where books and stacks of paper have been left, waiting for work to resume. Every pencil is in its cup, every book sits neatly on its shelf with room to spare, and all clutter is neatly filed out of sight. The ceilings are high, and tables are pushed into the middle of the room where they can soak up all the Southern Utah sunshine that pours in from every angle.

Despite these differences that may make DSU's facilities more aesthetically pleasing, there isn't as much personality or comradery built in. Everything feels too new. Many offices have only housed one professor's labors. Many of the first students to learn and work in the space are still present. Furnishings haven't yet been rearranged to make room for new additions, and spaces haven't been reworked to suit changing needs of the university.

Aside from the physical differences between the Utah State and Dixie State writing centers, working with students at USU has also been an entirely different experience. While the majority of students I worked with at Dixie State came into the Writing Center with a completed draft, eager to have a tutor point out a few minor errors and affirm their work before sending it off for submission, it seems to me that students at USU come into the Writing Center to collaborate with a tutor in a wider variety of stages of the writing process. The difference seems to lay in an emphasis on the *process* of writing rather than a textual product. At the DSU Writing Center, students who came in without a "finished" product were usually the least productive sessions in my opinion, some students only coming in to check a box and receive credit for visiting the center at all, whereas the students at USU are eager to come and mull over a topic with another set of ears, stepping back and viewing it from all angles before they sit down to write.

These brainstorming sessions have been my favorite sessions at the USUWC. Seeing students become so excited about their topics, watching the gears turning in their heads as they become inspired to write is inspiring to me. I also love learning about the topics that make each individual student tick. "Sorry, I find this is so fascinating. I'm such a nerd," seems to be a common apology.

The majority of students who come into these writing centers are in undergraduate programs, and they are working in general education courses. Many of them lack confidence in their writing skills. Even though they typically have plenty to say on a plethora of topics, they often hit a roadblock when it comes to putting pen to paper because they have been told that they aren't good enough writers. Students have confided in me the things that their teachers have told them in middle school, high school, and even the university: things that have discouraged them and convinced them that their writing isn't good and that their voice shouldn't be heard in that way.

As heart-breaking as these experiences are, they have inspired me to be a tutor and a teacher that is uplifting. In the tutoring cubicle, writers are allowed (and encouraged!) to take the reins on their writing. Writing and the creation of a text should be an empowering experience. A student should feel freedom in expressing their thoughts and opinions on paper, as it is an uninterrupted conversation with themselves that the rest of the world can view. When transcribing ideas on to paper, there isn't room for the reader to interrupt or qualify what the author has to say, other than in the margins. And yet, it sometimes feels like students are most hesitant to put pen to paper.

Perhaps it is the illusion of permanence when it comes to written word: spoken words don't hang in the air. Rather, they exist for an instant before they dissipate. Perhaps they live on in someone's mind, but even there they are twisted by perception and can evolve with the listener's thoughts. Writing makes a statement that is created and then must be destroyed in order to vanish. They must be shredded, tossed in the trash, or buried in a box to be forgotten.

And as a result, students feel the pressure for the words that they put on paper to be significant and well-written the first time around. In tutoring sessions and in my classroom, I

want to show students that writing is an ongoing affair. Revision needs to be encouraged as a natural step of the writing process and not a punishment for a job done poorly. Revision is a means for the author to continue conversing with themselves, allowing for new perspectives to permeate their writing and alter their arguments for the better. Revising is reflective of growth. As a teacher and a tutor, I feel that it is my responsibility to frame the revision process and my critiques as such. My power shouldn't be abused to show a writer their weaknesses, but instead create opportunity for strength by helping them in the process of revision.

I feel that Ray B. West reflects this concept. The building isn't new by any means. At just over a century old, many modifications have been made throughout, updating it to new safety codes, rearranging to meet new needs, and even expanding to accommodate growth. These are its strengths rather than its weaknesses.