



## Special Issue Call for Papers: (Re)defining “Welcome”

Part of the unique work of writing centers is that it happens in physical and online places--in sites--that are integral to this work. The sites inform the practice, and the practices influence the sites. For instance, much scholarship and lore has centered around the key elements of a physical writing center space, like the three “Cs” of the center: coffee, cookies, and couches (Carino 2003). Writing centers can be creative, safe, comfortable, homey places, yet they can also just as easily be dull, dangerous, triggering, uncomfortable businesses. The overarching grand narrative of writing centers, though, is that they do encourage spaces that are welcoming and homey, yet these narratives do not necessarily address the tensions found everyday among the various communities inhabiting a center at a given time (Gellar et al. 2007, McKinney 2013). As McKinney (2013) reminds us, “A homey center may work against the job writing centers want to do” (p. 27). Understanding more of what is welcoming and homey to different communities can better help centers come to terms with their own identities as (un)welcoming places. In this special issue, we endeavor to extend the conversation already begun in previous issues of *TPR*, such as the Fall 2018 “Brave(r) Spaces” issue, by asking writers to complicate their own understanding of writing center spaces as spaces that should, must be, or always are comfortable and welcoming. We are seeking submissions that not only continue to challenge commonly held lore and beliefs about the writing center as safe, comfortable, and welcoming, but also to define the center as a space that, perhaps, doesn’t need these attributes.

The concept of being “welcoming” is complex in terms of writing centers. Specifically, a center’s positionality within an institution creates a complex notion of power and hierarchy that can complicate how and to whom “welcome” is made. Indeed, as early as 1999, Nancy Grimm posited that institutionally, “the ability of a writing center to move differently within [a pluralistic democracy] is dependent on a better understanding of how literacy and power operate within a democratic system” (pp. 82-83). This situatedness often comes more in the form of writing centers positioning themselves as “cozy homes,” and in thinking about writing centers as “cozy homes.” McKinney (2013) asks, “If a writing center is a home, whose home is it? Mine? Yours? For whom is it comfortable? Everyone, likely more than once, has entered another person’s home and immediately felt uncomfortable, however welcoming the host or however strong our desire to be there” (p. 25). As “welcoming” hosts, we might think about the ways in which our work toward being hospitable might turn certain clients away. In addition, writing centers may be considered welcoming for consultants but not clients, as consultants often have a hand in

decorating the center-- such decorations might mark a space as exclusive, rather than inclusive (Gellar, et al. 2007; McKinney, 2013).

“Welcome” also includes connotations of inclusivity, especially with regard to race, gender, sexuality, and language. However, working toward inclusivity through the concept of “everyone is welcome” may lead to its own problems. For example, inclusivity becomes complicated when writing centers have clients who visit the center with racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise oppressive papers. For example, Boquet (2000) discusses an incident in which difficult clients with offensive papers were often sent to a conservative, white male consultant to look over the paper (p. 27). Indeed, pairing consultants and clients based on interest or affiliation can be useful in terms of making clients feel welcome, but such forms of welcome may not make room for the intellectual or emotional growth of the client.

Sometimes, it may seem as if being welcoming and doing one’s job in the writing center are at odds with one another. For instance, we may consider the ways in which making “better writers, not better writing” (North, 1984, p. 438) contributes to colonial notions of progress within the neoliberal academic institution (Bawarshi and Pelkoswki, 1999, p. 45). Is it possible to welcome clients who come to the center to be fundamentally changed “for the better,” or is our job more aligned with a grand narrative of comfort and tradition? Perhaps this issue, among others, is what leads clients to “ghost” consultants with stories that become impactful and linger, as discussed by Blitz and Hulbert (2000, p. 85). Writing centers are often sites of deep vulnerability for both clients and consultants, but the outside conception of the writing center as a place for writing improvement may inhibit such vulnerability.

In this special issue, we seek to (re)define how the writing center grand narrative addresses “welcome” in our spaces. Additionally, we are looking for submissions that experiment with multiple modes: use of gifs, links, images, video, etc. is welcome. We invite submissions by writers interested in complicating definitions of “welcome” in writing centers by addressing any of these questions:

- What makes a writing center welcome? In what ways does your writing center welcome “unwelcoming” writers?
- What are consultants doing in their own sessions to make writers feel welcome?
- How are we (consultants/administrators) addressing our writing centers’ ghosts to create/recreate welcoming spaces?
- Are there populations of writers outside our grand narrative who might feel excluded by what we consider welcoming? Why or why not? What are we doing to make them feel more welcome in our space? Should we?
- How much responsibility should fall on the writing center to create a welcoming space for all students?
- How does the concept of welcome intersect with issues of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.)?
- What are the pitfalls of creating a welcoming space, and how do we address those?
- What kinds of consultant training has to happen to (re)define a welcoming writing center?

- How does the implementation and use of online spaces in the writing center (re)define home?

Please email your proposals of no more than 700 words or inquiries to:  
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Proposed Tentative Timeline:

- January 31, 2018: Proposal due
- March 1, 2018: Acceptances distributed
- June 1, 2018: Full drafts due
- August 15, 2018: Feedback to authors
- October 1, 2018: Final drafts due
- January 1, 2018: Publication of issue

#### References

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