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WRITING CENTER EFFECTIVENESS: STUDENTS' AND  
TUTORS' PERCEPTIONS

By

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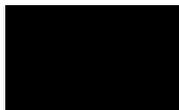
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To my loving parents and husband

# WRITING CENTER EFFECTIVENESS: STUDENTS' AND TUTORS' PERCEPTIONS

Leen Abu-Teen

## Abstract

This study was conducted at a writing center at an English medium university in Lebanon in attempt to examine students' and tutors' perceptions about the effectiveness of the center in terms of improving student writing. To gather data, a questionnaire was given to 42 students upon visiting the center, interviews were conducted with five tutors, and the researcher kept an anecdotal record. The results show that the majority of students are satisfied with the tutorials, and this satisfaction could be correlated with the fact that the tutors answered their questions, helped them improve their writing, and offered them useful feedback. The tutors are also satisfied with the tutorials, and they are flexible in their tutoring style. The anecdotal record adds to the center's effectiveness.

Keywords: Writing Center, Tutors' Perceptions, Students' Perceptions, Lebanon.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 - Overview

Writing is a powerful means of communication that transcends time and space. It is, nevertheless, a sophisticated task that is not easy to undertake. Many difficulties arise along the process of writing. These difficulties increase upon writing in a second language. Many researchers (see for instance, Bilton & Sivasubramaniam, 2009; Calkins, 1994; Fernsten, 2008; Hyland, 2003; Reid, 1993) have investigated the issue of second language (L2) writing and teaching. Though there is no one comprehensive theory of the L2 writing process, it is still possible to identify a few trends related to the teaching of writing.

Major changes have taken place in the domain of teaching writing. There has been a shift from emphasis on the writing ‘product’ to emphasis on the ‘process’ of writing. Following the product approach, students produce the type of writing that is related to “academic themes” (Reid, 1993, p. 29). Teachers following this approach emphasize the notions of “the thesis statement and the topic sentence, paragraph unity, organizational strategies, and development of paragraphs by ‘patterns’ or modes: process, comparison/contrast, cause-effect, classification/partition, definition, etc.” (Reid, 1993, p.30).

A more recent approach to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) writing, the process approach, attempts to replicate “the supposed strategies of good writers” (Bilton & Sivasubramaniam, 2009, p.302-303). Following this approach, students examine topics through writing, read and evaluate their classmates’ drafts, and

employ each draft to write a new one. Many teachers have implemented process writing in their classrooms since the 1980s. As a result of following this approach, writing became less restricted as students went through discovery activities and journal writing, which reduced their levels of anxiety (Reid, 1993).

There has been another major shift in education from traditional approaches to learner-centered approaches. The learner-centered approach focuses on the learner and the learning process and highlights three principles: “encouragement of meaningful and deep learning, challenging higher-order thinking, and adaptation to individual and cultural differences” (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010, p.xxv). Cornelius-White and Harbaugh (2010) define learner-centered instruction as:

an approach to teaching and learning that prioritizes facilitative relationships, the uniqueness of every learner, and the best evidence on learning processes to promote comprehensive student success through engaged achievement (p.xxvii).

North (1984) states that the writing center embodies:

the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered (p. 438).

## **1.2 - Purpose of the Study**

In this study, my aim was to try to answer the following general research question: How effective do students and tutors view the writing center in terms of improving student writing? I also aimed at gathering clues about the reasons for students’ perceptions and information about the tutors’ styles in tutoring and the strategies that they use.

### **1.3 - Research Context**

The study took place at the Writing Center in an English-medium university in Lebanon during the spring 2011 semester. The university mainly offers courses in the English language except for those related to Arabic studies. The instructors are of different nationalities, but mainly Lebanese, American and British. The students also come from different countries, but a large number of them are Lebanese. The Writing Center was established during the fall 2010 semester i.e. one semester before this study was conducted. It opens daily for four hours. The center's mission, philosophy and goals are found in the proposal for establishing the writing center, which is supplied to tutors in a packet that includes other important articles related to the writing center literature. The center's mission is in line with the university's mission, which is dedicated to 'academic excellence' and 'student-centeredness.' The following guidelines sum up the center's philosophy: "The Writing Center is not a proofreading or editing service; the Writing Center is not a place for 'remediation;' tutorials are offered in a one-to-one setting; tutors are coaches and collaborators, not teachers; each writer's individual needs are the focus of the tutorial; the Writing Center caters to the entire university; tutors should neither directly nor indirectly offer criticism of a teacher's assignments, methods, feedback, or grading practices." The center's general goals for the time being involve "promot[ing] a general culture of writing at the university, improv[ing] student writing through individual tutoring, workshops, and other resources, help[ing] students become more confident and more independent writers, and establish[ing] and maintain[ing] professional affiliations with writing centers in the region and internationally."

#### **1.4 - Definition**

The writing center can be simply defined as “a place where people get together, usually one-to-one, and talk about writing” (Leahy, 1990, p.43). Its staff members can be either faculty, or students, or a mix of both (Tobin, 2010).

#### **1.5 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the complexity of the writing process and the major changes that the teaching of writing has undergone. I also introduced the writing center as embodying two of the most influential modern viewpoints on teaching writing. Moreover, I stated that the purpose of the study is to generally investigate the effectiveness of the writing center at an English medium university in Lebanon. In the next chapter, I review the literature covering the background of the writing center, its merits, its most attacked depiction and two most debatable issues regarding writing center work.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 - Background**

The writing center has been called other names such as “lab,” “clinic,” “place,” “studio,” and “workshop” (Trimbur, 2000, p.88). Many faculty members and students do not accurately understand what the mission of a writing center is (Leahy, 1990; North, 1984). A common misconception is thinking of the writing center as a “fix-it shop” that deals with students with “special problems” (North, 1984, p. 435) or “for students who need help” (Grimm, 1999, p.2). As a matter of fact, the work of the writing center is frequently pictured as “dull, sentence-level editing” (Grimm, 1999, p.2). Leahy (1990) states that the reason for this misconception is partly because the majority of writing centers did actually begin as “remedial labs” (p.4). North (1984) asserts that writing centers have existed, “in one form or another” (p. 436), since the 1930s, but the “new” writing center is the result of a “renaissance” that started in the 1970s (p. 438).

#### **2.2 - Merits of the Writing Center**

Welch (2010) regards the writing center as a place for “critical exile” as it offers students and teachers “critical distance” from “social conversations” (p. 70). The writing center provides students with the opportunity to distance themselves from their writing and, at the same time, collaborate with their writing. Besides, it is free from the constrictions of “a predetermined curriculum and the normative force of grades” (Welch, 2010, p. 71). Tobin (2010) states that the writing center offers students a “creative,” “supportive,” and “non-judgmental” learning environment (p.230). Because

tutors at the writing center are not the ones who give grades, students focus more on the process rather than the product of writing and become more aware of themselves as writers (Tobin, 2010).

The writing center has several functions. It is a resource for materials related to writing. It also provides faculty with the chance of development as a result of attending workshops and conferences. In addition, it enhances the tutors' writing themselves and strengthens their interpersonal and teaching skills (Harris, 1995).

Harris (1995) asserts that when writers meet with tutors, writers become more knowledgeable about aspects of themselves and of their writings in ways that cannot be achieved in alternative settings. This is why "writing instruction without a writing center is only a partial program, lacking essential activities students need in order to grow and mature as writers" (Harris, 1995, p.40).

Harris (1995) states that

Writing centers do not and should not repeat the classroom experience and are not there to compensate for poor teaching, over-crowded classrooms, or lack of time for overburdened instructors to confer adequately with their students. Instead, writing centers provide another, very crucial aspect of what writers need-- tutorial interaction (p.27).

Harris (1995) argues that "tutorial instruction" significantly differs from conventional classroom teaching since it brings in "a middle person, the tutor," who is neither a student, nor a teacher, but somewhere in-between (p.27). Along the same lines, Jones (2001) indicates that research on writing centers reveals that tutoring has particular advantages upon comparison with other methods of teaching writing. Harris (1995) declares that students regard tutors as people who can assist them in overcoming the obstacles that others have created. Students react to tutors and to teachers in a

different way. Even though the majority of students visit the writing center because they are compelled to, students depart with a sense that their visit was helpful and that they have more control over their writing. Students start to talk with less restraint and more sincerity as the tutorial proceeds since they are outside the boundaries of the classroom and are not afraid of asking what they believe are silly questions. Students also find out that they are not required to listen submissively and that they do not have to accept what an imposing speaker is telling them (Harris, 1995).

Harris (1995) discusses several reasons “why writers need writing tutors” (title of the article). First, tutors who are skilled at the type of cooperation that promotes constructive investigative dialogue may steer the discussion; however, they do not hold the student back. In this way, tutors encourage writers’ independence. A tutor can also help a student “get the feel of” a few facets of writing (p. 33). For instance, students might believe that they are familiar with the method of brainstorming. Nevertheless, only after sitting with a tutor can a student experience “how it feels” to shut down that inner “editor” that discards paths of thought prior to their full examination (Harris, 1995, p.33). Harris (1995) states that “the art of the tutor is to collaborate with students as they acquire the practical knowledge they need” (p.34). Moreover, a tutor can help a writer in interpreting an assignment by translating “teacher language into student language” (p.37). In this way, the tutor aids the writer in gaining an understanding of academic language and academic writing (Harris, 1995).

In addition, many student writers do not feel confident about their writing skills and are anxious about writing. As tutors assist writers in matching what they have in their minds with what they have on paper, writers become more confident about their writing and more motivated to revise their papers (Harris, 1995). Along the same lines,

Pistone (2010) suggests that the “one-on-one” nature of the tutorials at the writing center makes the employment of the “caring tutoring approach” possible (p. 10). The latter approach leads to a closer relationship between the tutor and the tutee, which in turn addresses the tutee’s genuine needs and anxiety about writing more effectively. Moreover, Pistone (2010) compares the relationship between a tutor and a tutee to that between a midwife and a mother; the tutor and tutee work on improving the tutee’s paper in the same way a midwife guides the mother while giving birth. Pistone (2010) also states that students seek out tutors to lessen their anxiety related to their teachers’ demands in the same way clients go to psychologists to receive help in handling their anxiety and the obstacles they might be facing in life.

Sherwood (2007) investigates the “artistic aspects of tutoring” and declares that “the work tutors do in the writing center is equivalent to the work of a poet or a sculptor” (p. 53). According to Sherwood, in order for tutors to move from being artisans into artists, they should become skilled at handling surprise and unanticipated situations, at improvising proper assistance to writers, and at sustaining their willingness to being completely absorbed in the writer or the writing. Sherwood (2007) adds that tutors who despite their awareness of the fact that it is hard to master tutoring readily tackle, gain knowledge from, and make use of the “ambiguous moments” during which ideas surprisingly unite or fall apart are tutors who “think and act like artists” (p.65).

Grimm (1999) states that writing center staff are used to looking at the university and the literacy practices that take place in it from several viewpoints. Tutors at the writing center come across different “worldviews,” “cultural backgrounds,” “educational histories,” “teachers’ expectations,” and “disciplinary standards” (Grimm, 1999, p.1). These tutors acquire the ability to “stretch [their] conceptual horizons” while

working with students who have not come upon academic standards before, who are attempting to write in genres that are new to them, or whose “literacies” are not appreciated in the university (p.1). Grimm (1999) declares that the “intellectual challenge” of the work of the writing center lies in the fact that tutors have to concurrently meet the understandings of both students and teachers and attempt to shed light on where these considerations clash and the gaps emerge (p.1).

### **2.3 - Misconceptions and Marginalization of the Writing Center**

Carino (2002) declares that the most attacked depiction of the writing center is perhaps “that of the fix-it shop” (p.96). He adds that any person who has been a tutor at the writing center, even for a short period, has battled with this label and has noticed the large number of dissent it has received in the writing center literature. The history of the writing center has to do with this representation for a certain extent. Carino (2002) states that writing centers have been established in times of change, which usually entail higher admittance of students who do not speak the standard language. Some of the first units that would be identified nowadays as writing centers were established in the 1930’s. “Open admissions initiatives” and the common view of “falling literacy standards” were eminent in the 1970’s (p.96-97). This is why centers and labs were generally required to assist students in writing in Standard English. Nevertheless, many writing centers shortly noticed that students wanted and were in need of tutoring not only in grammar to be successful. Even though the majority of writing instructors progressively and sometimes reluctantly embraced the writing center as complementary to their work in the classroom, a number of them retained “the marginalizing image of the center as grammar garage” (Carino, 2002, p.97).

Several faculty members are still apprehensive of “ethical misconduct” at the writing center and presume that tutors “write students’ papers for them” (Carino, 2002, p.91). Other faculty doubt whether centers are capable of helping enough, enquiring if a tutor whose major is English can help a Chemistry major tutee, for instance, or whether peer tutoring is nothing but “the blind leading the blind” (p.91). Moreover, even though composition instructors are usually supportive nowadays, they previously were concerned that the creation of a writing center meant that they were falling short at carrying out their jobs. Also, even if these instructors originally supported the writing center, they occasionally questioned why tutors tackled the same issues that were discussed in class and did not simply fix students’ grammatical mistakes. Students also have had some concerns. Some fear that their classmates might think of them as unintelligent. Others question the worth of wasting one hour at a place where they would one more time be requested to write their own papers. Even administrators have speculated whether centers are of real value when they faced tight budgets (Carino, 2002).

Writing center’s staff members’ assert that they do not do the work of students, and they are concerned that others might think of the center as an “institutionally sanctioned form of cheating” (Carino, 2002, p.99). This skepticism is mostly related to western cultural views that consider “the writer as [an] individual voice”, “writing as solitary act,” and “text as individual property” (p.99). This stance disregards cultural studies and recent historicist dispute that there is not any text that is absolutely one person’s work (Carino, 2002).

Another reason for writing centers’ assertion that they do not do the work of students is the “Rogerian nondirective pedagogy” which has been promoted in writing

center literature as early as the 1940's and is still supported today (Carino, 2002, p.99). In his article "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," Brooks (1991) recounts "a writing center worst-case scenario" (p.1) in which the tutor highlights the mechanical errors in a student's paper and proposes some ways to improve the organization of the paper, and the student consents and makes the improvements. The same student returns the following week to the writing center and tells the tutor that s/he got an 'A' on the paper and thanks the tutor for his or her help. Brooks (1991) states that it is difficult to stay away from this scenario since it makes both tutor and tutee "feel good" (p.1). Brooks (1991) adds that the fact that this scenario is a bad one underlines the fundamental complexity tutors face. The author declares that tutors conference with students who come with papers that are not perfect, but the tutors' job is to develop the writers themselves. A tutor who improves a writer's paper is not a tutor but an editor. A tutor should aim at learning and not at a flawless paper. A tutor should also make sure that the student "own[s]" (Brooks, 1991, p.2) his/her paper and feels responsible for it. Brooks (1991) proposes that "when [tutors] refuse to edit, [tutors] become more active than ever as educators" (p.2).

The writing center differs from the traditional classroom. This difference gives the center the "freedom to innovate", "experiment", "play", "cross disciplinary and organizational borders" i.e. to alter the manner things are carried out in general (Carino, 2002, p. 91). This difference, at the same time, adds to the marginalization of the center since the center opposes the traditional structures of the university. This is why centers are regularly suspect (Carino, 2002).

Grimm (1996) affirms that in order for writing centers to legalize themselves as "academic units" and not as "service units" (p.534), they have to carry out a continuous

endeavour to validate their work through theory rather than through numbers. Grimm (1996) draws on Lev Vygotsky's theory on intellectual development to theorize the writing center practice. Vygotsky's theory states that intellectual development does not take place as a steady growth of inborn individual aptitude but that one's 'abilities', 'ideas', and 'language' are an outcome of his or her interactions with other people (p. 535). This concept, Grimm (1996) asserts, sanctions the work of the writing center more forcefully than a record of numerous services that the center offers. A person draws on internalized inner speech to write. Inner speech is not the outcome of a developmental process; it is the result of a socialization process i.e. interaction with other people. One cannot internalize the concepts s/he has to rely on to write unless s/he has the chance to interrelate with other people on the topic that s/he has to write about. Vygotsky's theory affirms that an "interactive relationship" with a person who is "willing to construct a scaffold for the work of abstraction," and is "willing to recognize and engage existing patterns of literacy" is necessary for the development of literacy (Grimm, 1996, p.536). Grimm (1996) states that this theoretical argument demonstrates that a writing center is crucial to a university's educational mission.

Grimm (1999) states that the outcome of efforts to adjust the poor depictions of the work of writing centers is regularly disappointment since "the postmodernist understandings that develop in the writing center clash with the modernist understandings that structure higher education" (p.2). Postmodernist conceptions question "essential truths" about the writing center (p.2). The work of the writing center reveals the boundaries of present literacy practices in the same way that postmodernist thought exposes the boundaries of modernist convictions. Nevertheless, due to the fact that writing centers are financially supported for modernist grounds, specifically to

make students' writing clearer and more orderly and correct, those who work at the writing center usually are forced not to question the university's inherent suppositions so as to accomplish their specified role (Grimm, 1999).

Grimm (1999) asserts that the writing center will continue to be underestimated in a modernist framework since it is supposed to hide inconsistencies or enclose diversity. Grimm (1999) suggests that post-modern theorizing can be employed to express the significance of the writing center. The researcher uses the word 'postmodern' not to hold close any specific theory rather as a recognition of the alteration in individual consciousness as a result of the technological revolution in communication, the many meetings with diversity, and the international economy. Grimm (1999) states that despite the rapid changes in social conditions, universities currently function to a large extent similarly to how they used to function three decades ago. Modernist values of personal independence, logical thinking, and clear communication regulate the university. A large number of constantly unsolvable concerns related to the writing center's identity, role, and financial support are tied to the university's adherence to modernist beliefs during immense cultural shift to post modernity. Questions frequently asked in conversations about the writing center such as: "Should we send faculty members reports on students?" "Should writing center tutors be allowed to write on a student's paper?" or "How often and for how long should we allow a student to use the writing center?" are associated with modernist beliefs about "personal individual autonomy, ownership, and responsibility" (p.4). Even though teachers are aware of the fact that complex topics are enhanced when one brings in several viewpoints, they, nonetheless, expect students to have a consistent and cohesive standpoint in their writings. Grimms (1999) states that theorizing does not

solve the problems, but it allows her to be proactive, “feeds [her] intellectual understanding” (p.14), and offers her other methods of reacting to change.

#### **2.4 - Directiveness Vs. Indirectiveness**

Several issues related to the writing center’s work have been subject to debate. According to writing center “lore” (lore being defined as “cherished beliefs”) concerning tutors’ roles, tutors and students have to “collaborate as equals” during the tutoring session, tutors have to “avoid directiveness” in assisting students in advancing their writing skills instead of informing them directly about how they can develop a draft, and tutors should not draw on their expertise in order to stay as an equal to the student and to avoid being direct (Thompson, Whyte, Shannon, Muse, Miller, Chappell & Whigham, 2009, p.79-81).

Thompson et al. (2009) investigate writing center lore about the role of a tutor and the effect of this lore on the satisfaction of both students and tutors about the conference. The survey results analyses revealed that the variables that had the largest effect on students’ satisfaction were students’ perceptions of “having their questions answered” and of “tutors’ expertise” (p.95). Other variables that affected students’ satisfaction were “students’ perceptions of their own comfort and of the amount of positive feedback they received” (p.95). Conversely, the items of the survey referring to “lore-base mandates” that state that “students should talk the most during conferences and that tutors should act as peers rather than as instructors” had a minor effect on students’ satisfaction (p.95). The variables that had a major effect on tutors’ satisfaction were similar to three of the variables that influenced students’ satisfaction. These were tutors’ perceptions of “answering students’ questions,” “attending to students’ comfort,”

and “providing positive feedback” (p.95). The survey promoted only the lore-based mandates related to the tutor’s duty of creating a comfortable environment for the student to pose questions. Furthermore, the survey results do not endorse the mandate based on writing center lore that advocates the collaboration between tutors and students as equals. The survey results analysis also opposes the mandate against directiveness and advocates empirical research results that show that tutors are not capable of avoiding directiveness and that “this directiveness is often appreciated by students” (p.79). The researchers suggest that experienced tutors may be caught up between following directive and indirective techniques. Despite the fact that writing center lore may favor nondirective tutoring, Thompson et al. (2009)’s survey proposes that, based on their experience in assisting students in carrying out a task effectively, tutors believe that an amount of directiveness is essential. Thompson et al. (2009) add that students are prone to promote tutors’ directiveness. The students that participated in the survey might have been interested in advancing their drafts rather than in generally advancing their writing skills. Many freshman and sophomore students do not want to spend much time on English assignments, and they may not be sufficiently mature yet to value nondirective tutoring practices (Thompson et al., 2009).

Thompson et al. (2009) conclude their study suggesting that “it might be time to clean our writing center closets” (p.100). They add that despite the fact that several lore mandates are valuable and have been empirically confirmed, particularly the significance of the comfort of students, those mandates that advocate tutors’ and students’ equal roles should be discarded (Thompson et al., 2009). Along the same lines, Grimm (1999) states that “writing center work regularly invites us to hold the

mirror up close, to see the inadequacies, the pretensions, the wrinkles of practices that previously looked smooth” (p.26).

### **2.5 - Higher-Order Vs. Lower-Order Concerns**

Another debatable issue related to writing center work is the focus on higher-order as opposed to lower-order concerns. Writing center researchers and staff generally oppose “working with students at the sentence-level” which is considered to be “lower-order concerns” since according to the “writing center manifesto,” tutors are supposed to “work with the writer, not the writing” (Robinson, 2009, p.71). It is usually recommended that tutors work with “higher-order concerns of focus, organization, and development” prior to working with “lower-order concerns of grammar and mechanics” (Blau & Hall, 2002, p.24). Nevertheless, Blau and Hall (2002) state that the tutoring strategies that can be used with native speakers cannot be simply used with non-native speakers. Despite the fact that the strategies used with native speakers might work with the more fluent non-native speakers, students who have a weak grasp of English may need more flexibility, direction and coaching. Blau and Hall (2002) add that these students first regularly require instruction at the level of the sentence, and then they can deal with more “global issues” such as “focus, organization, and development of ideas” (p.35). If every sentence contains considerable problems at the level of the sentence, it becomes hard for the tutor to uncover the focus of the paper. Blau and Hall (2002) propose a solution to this issue, which is to “interweave the discussion of global and local concerns” (p.35). Following this strategy, tutors still attend to global concerns, but they can make sure that some basic language problems have been clarified first (Blau & Hall, 2002).

Furthermore, Robinson (2009) suggests that the division between higher-order and lower-order concerns restricts tutors' engagement with basic writers as it splits between content and language. The researcher proposes that the writing center's goal could be to help students become more intrinsically motivated. Students' extrinsic motivation mainly comes from wanting to meet their instructors' demands. On the other hand, students' intrinsic motivation would mainly come from having their personal motives to work on their writing such as to express themselves and their own ideas. Students become more intrinsically motivated as they associate the behavior with their sense of self or as the behavior gives them inherent pleasure. Because invention (coming up with something to write about) is the element of the writing process that can be strongly associated with the writer's sense of self, it is the nearest to intrinsic motivation. Tutors would like writers to eventually develop their own standpoints. Moreover, Robinson (2009) states that the writing center's major appeal, which is "help with grammar, spelling, and punctuation" appears to make students visit the center and lures them to visit it again (p.72). Nevertheless, as students' visits to the center become more frequent, students start to move from a pure emphasis on mechanics into a more holistic approach to writing, and in this way, they would be moving from being extrinsically to being intrinsically motivated. This is why as students work at the writing center, they become more independent as writers (Robinson, 2009).

## **2.6 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I highlighted the importance of the writing center, the main misconception about it as a "fix-it-shop," and its marginalization. I also discussed two major issues related to the work of the writing center. In the next chapter, I describe the research design and the three methods used to collect data.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1 – Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section portrays the participants and the research design of the study. The second section illustrates the three instruments of data collection: questionnaire, interviews and anecdotal record. The last section covers the ethical considerations and the issues of validity and reliability that were taken into account.

#### **3.2 - Participants**

The participants are 42 students who have visited the writing center and five tutors who work at the center. The students are males and females with different majors and university statuses (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior and graduate). Three tutors are full-time instructors at the university, one tutor is a part-timer working only at the writing center, and one is a graduate student.

#### **3.3 - Research Design**

The research design of this study is that of a case study. A case study is the study of a “single instance” which is “of a bounded system,” for instance “a child, a clique, a class, a school, [or] a community” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.181). The “single instance” of this study is the students who visit and the tutors who work at a writing center creating a writing center community at a university in Lebanon. A case study portrays “real people in real situations” assisting readers in understanding

concepts better as opposed to merely providing them with intangible theories (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 181).

### **3.4 - Instrumentation**

Information about the effectiveness of the writing center was collected from three sources: a questionnaire, interviews, and anecdotal record.

#### **3.4.1 - Questionnaire**

The first method of data collection was a questionnaire given only once to students who visited the writing center (it might be their first, second or any number of visit) in order to gain insight into their attitudes towards the writing center. The students completed the questionnaire on a voluntary basis at the end of the tutoring session. In the questionnaire, students are first asked to fill in some background information and then to rate some statements related to the writing center's effectiveness on a Likert scale and finally to write down any additional comments or suggestions (see the questionnaire in Appendix I). I had piloted this questionnaire during the fall semester and had made some minor changes.

The main advantage of a questionnaire is that it can be given to a large number of individuals in a reasonably short period (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Also, participants can fill it in relatively quickly and so it should not be regarded as a tedious task (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). The participants in this study filled in this questionnaire in three minutes on average. One disadvantage is that participants cannot develop or respond verbally to a questionnaire item they are interested in or think is important (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). This is why I added a section at the end of the questionnaire for any additional comments or suggestions.

### **3.4.2 - Interviews**

The second method was interviews with the writing center tutors. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions aimed at generally examining the tutors' perceptions of the writing center's effectiveness and specifically whether and how students were benefiting from the center, and whether the students and the tutors were satisfied with the quality of tutorials (see the interview questions in Appendix II). The interview questions are somehow in parallel with the questionnaire. I added some questions to learn more about each tutor's style in tutoring, whether they are satisfied with the tutorials or not, and how tutorials could be improved. The questions were piloted, and I made some minor changes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed (see transcription of the interviews in Appendix III). The interviews took between seven to fifteen minutes to be conducted.

The major advantages of interviews are that the interviewer has the chance to clarify any question that the interviewee might find ambiguous and to ask the interviewee to develop significant or revealing answers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Nevertheless, an interview takes a longer time than a questionnaire to be conducted. This is one of the reasons why I chose to give the students a questionnaire and the tutors an interview. Another disadvantage of interviews is that because of the presence of the interviewer, interviewees might not say what they truly believe in.

### **3.4.3 - Anecdotal Record**

As a third source, I, being a tutor at the Writing Center myself, recounted some anecdotes related to the center's effectiveness. An anecdotal record is simply "a record of observed behaviours written down in the form of anecdotes" (Fraenkel & Wallen,

2006, p. 124). Observers can write down any behavior that they believe is significant and do not need to focus on similar behaviors for all individuals. Nevertheless, observers need to be precise and factual and have to keep away from “evaluative,” “interpretive” and “overly generalized” comments (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 124).

### **3.5 - Ethical Considerations**

As a first step, I obtained the verbal consent of the writing center’s Director to conduct my study on the center. The participants were also informed about the study; the tutors were notified at a meeting, and all agreed to be interviewed, and the students were told about the study upon giving them the questionnaire, and all participated on a voluntary basis. None of the participants was physically or psychologically harmed during the study, and none was deceived (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Another ethical concern, which is that of confidentiality, was taken into consideration (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). This is why the name of the university at which the writing center is located was not revealed, the tutors were given fictional names, and the questionnaires were anonymous.

### **3.6 - Validity and Reliability**

To ensure validity and reliability, several measures were taken. First, I created the questionnaire after surveying several questionnaires related to the writing center, and I made sure that it has an appropriate readability level with clear instructions and questions. I also made it a short questionnaire so that students agree to take it in the first place and to increase the probability of them filling it all in and reading it carefully and not just to get done with it. Moreover, I piloted this questionnaire during the fall semester. Piloting the questionnaire improves its validity and reliability (Cohen et al.,

2000). Second, triangulation which is “the use of two or more methods of data collection” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.112) was employed to examine multiple perceptions on the effectiveness of the writing center. A questionnaire was given to students, interviews were conducted with tutors, and an anecdotal record was created. Triangulation enhances the quality of collected data and the accurateness of the researcher’s analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Third, I attempted to avoid bias while gathering data and analyzing the results (Cohen et al., 2000). All of the tutors were asked the same questions with the same wording and sequence, and all interviews were accurately transcribed. Also, all data collected from questionnaires were accurately entered on SPSS. Moreover, I tried to be as precise and factual as possible while recording the anecdotes. Finally, I avoided generalizing my findings.

### **3.7 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the three methods of data collection. I also considered ethical issues, and the validity and reliability of the three methods and of the data collected. In the next chapter, I reveal the results of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 – Introduction

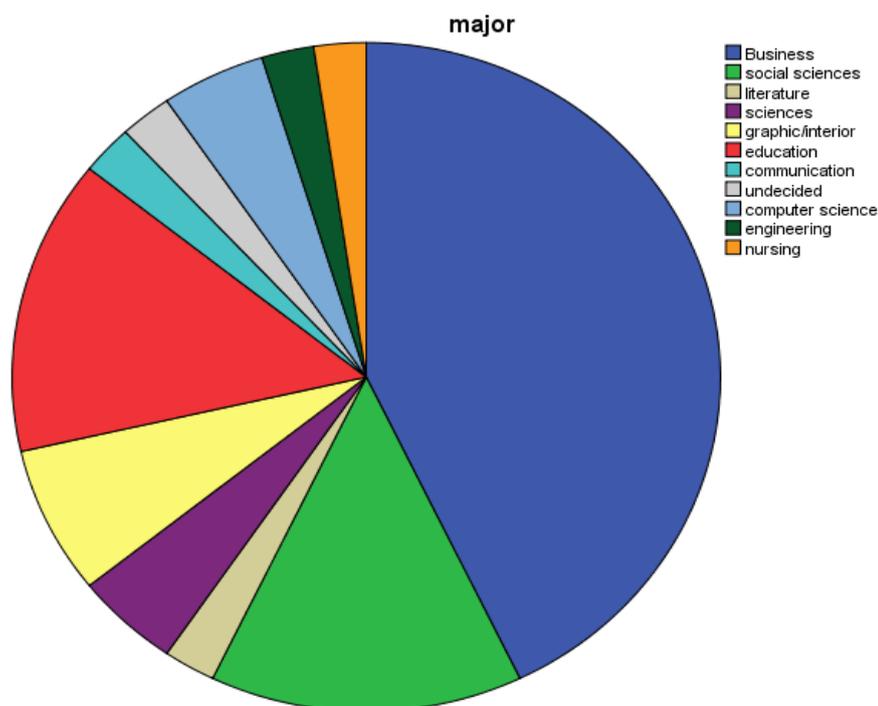
This chapter reveals the findings of the study. Data collected from the questionnaire, interviews and anecdotal record are displayed.

#### 4.2 - Questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire was mainly about background information related to the participants. Thus, the results show that 33.3% of the respondents were males and 66.7% were females; 14.3% were freshman students, 40.5% sophomore, 7.1% junior, 19% senior and 19% graduate.

#### CHART 4.1

##### Students' Majors



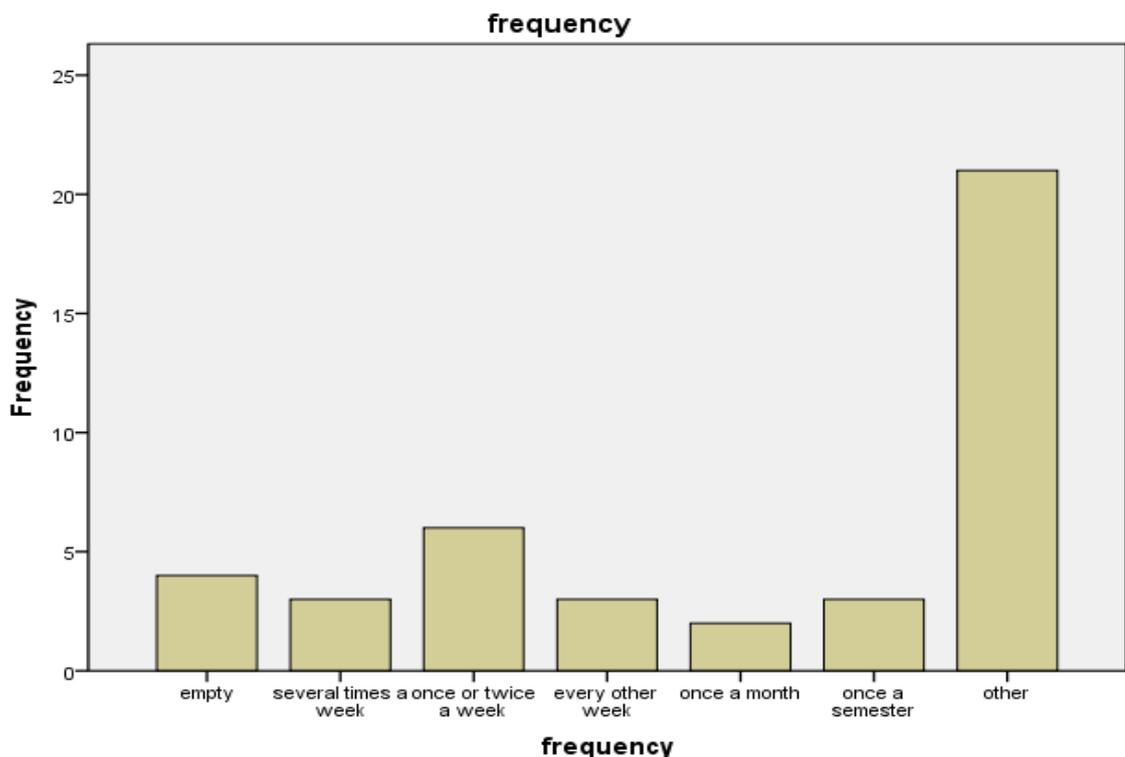
The pie graph illustrates the majors the participants are pursuing at the university: thus, the three main majors are business (42.9%), social sciences (14.3%) and education (14.3%).

The majority of the participants spoke two languages (50%) with English as their second language (78.6%).

Although the official opening of the writing center at the university under scrutiny was at the end of Spring 2010, it is only in this academic year 2011-2012 that faculty members and students got to know about it. Thus, it is quite encouraging to know that participants have been visiting the writing center.

#### **CHART 4.2**

##### **Frequency of Students' Visits to the Writing Center**



Most of the participants (69%) had visited the writing center for the first time when they were given the questionnaire, while 9.5% had visited it twice and 14.3% had visited it three times. Fifty percent of the participants marked “other” when asked about the frequency of their visits to the writing center explaining that it is their “first time” or “whenever needed,” and 14.3% stated that they visit the writing center “once or twice a week.”

Participants’ responses fluctuated when asked about the areas they needed help in the session.

**TABLE 4.1**

**Help Needed Before the Session**

Areas	Percentages
Brainstorming	16.7%
Introduction	9.5%
Conclusion	9.5%
Organization	31%
Content	33.3%
Grammar	47.6%
CV	26.2%
Other	16.7%

Thus, when asked about the areas they needed help in before the session, 16.7% chose brainstorming, 9.5% introduction, 9.5% conclusion, 31% organization, 33.3% content, 47.6 % grammar, 26.2% CV and 16.7% other. “Other” included how to write an argumentative claim; summaries, response and analysis of articles; personal statement for Fulbright; sentence structure; tree outline; APA; and editing.

When asked about the areas they received help in during the session, the responses were different from the areas they needed help in before the session.

**TABLE 4.2****Help Received During the Session**

Areas	Percentages
Brainstorming	26.2%
Introduction	7.1%
Conclusion	2.4%
Organization	38.1%
Content	42.9%
Grammar	47.6%
CV	23.8%
Other	11.9%

26.2% choose brainstorming, 7.1% introduction, 2.4% conclusion, 38.1% organization, 42.9% content, 47.6% grammar, 23.8% CV and 11.9% other. “Other” included APA format; revising APA of references; editing; and a summary essay on a study.

**TABLE 4.3****Likert Scale Items**

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree
Satisfied	35.7%	64.3%
Tutor answered questions	28.6%	71.4%
Tutor helped improve assignment	23.8%	73.8%
Useful feedback	45.2%	45.2%
Feedback gives strategies	47.6%	50%
Feedback about areas to be improved	35.7%	61.9%
Visit again	28.6%	71.4%
Recommend to others	33.3%	64.3%
Grades improved	9.5%	11.9%
Improved writing ability	11.9%	19%

When asked whether they were satisfied with what went on during the writing session, 64.3% chose strongly agree and 35.7% chose agree. Almost 72% of the participants strongly agreed that the tutor answered the questions that they asked, and 28.6% agreed.

Moreover, almost 74% of the participants strongly agreed that the tutor helped them improve their writing assignment, and 23.8% agreed. When asked about feedback, 45.2% strongly agreed and 45.2% agreed that they received useful feedback on their writing, 50% strongly agreed and 47.6% agreed that feedback from the writing center gives them ideas and strategies that they could apply to other assignments in the future, and 61.9% strongly agreed and 35.7% agreed that feedback from the writing center helps them recognize exactly what areas in their writing need to be improved. Almost 72% of participants strongly agreed that they will visit the writing center again for help on future writing assignments, and 28.6% agreed. When asked whether they will recommend the writing center to others, 64.3% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed.

The last two items on the Likert scale were mostly left empty. Nevertheless, 11.9% strongly agreed that their grades on their papers improved due to their visits to the writing center and 9.5% agreed, and 19% strongly agreed that the writing center has helped them improve their writing ability in general and 11.9% agreed.

Additional comments and suggestions included:

- Make sure everyone knows the benefits of the writing center because it is very beneficial. Thank you.
- I am grateful to creating this center and for opening from 3→4. Thank you.
- It's my first time but I am glad for this center they helped me to improve my writing and feedback from the writing center gives me ideas and strategies that I can apply to other assignments in the future.
- I think the writing center will help me to improve my writing skills, and my weaknesses.
- Thank you.
- Include additional useful hand-outs.
- I don't have any additional comments.

- Not all the tutors are helpful. Some don't go deeply in the assignment. I feel more relaxed with tutor X in comparison to other tutors.
- After visiting the writing center, I found it helpful for me, as a student. It makes me feel to be sure, to present an assignment well prepared.
- Thank you ☺
- Tutor Y is the Best she really helps me a lot.
- I would like to improve my way in writing reports and summaries, and I expect this help from the writing center.
- I suggest having tutors in the writing center from different emphasis.
- I would like to thank the people who are involved in this center and who are helping us. Hopefully will revisit you soon. ☺

### **4.3 - Interviews**

The five interviewees are tutors at the writing center. Three tutors are full-time instructors at the university, one tutor is a part-timer working only at the writing center, and one is a graduate student. The interviewees are given fictitious names.

When asked whether they focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general, most of the interviewees stated that they focus on the student's paper. Carla and Mona said that it is the "starting point" since it is "a sample of what the student can do or what the student's proficiency is like" (Mona), it "give[s] [them] information about the [...] recurring errors" and "the difficulties that the student is facing" (Carla), and it is "the only evidence of the student's level of writing" (Sarah) that the tutor has. Most of the tutors added that they later move from the paper into the student's general writing skills and problems.

In the second question, Carla, Mona, and Dina stated that they prioritize organization which is important for the clarity of ideas and meaning. Mona and Dina added that they then move to the mechanics especially if, as Mona stated, it "impedes

comprehension.” Rima declared that the first thing she looks for is “a good thesis” so that the student has a main point and a message to convey, and then she looks at the organization of ideas and diction. She added that she rarely has time to work on “punctuation and minor editing.” Sarah said that “it depends on the student” and that she “spend[s] equal time” on both content and language.

When asked who they feel talks more during the session (themselves or the student) and who they think should talk more, most of the tutors agreed that it depends on the student, and that in some cases they do talk more. Rima stated that in some cases “the student needs [...] to hear that [...] they’re on the right track;” “they need [the tutor] to say some things.” She added that “if you just keep quiet because that’s what you’re supposed to do, in some cases, that’s not what the student wants.” Along the same lines, Carla declared that “the students want to hear what [tutors] have to say” because they come to the writing center “seeking advice [and] help.” Mona added that some students are “assertive” while “others are shy and afraid to show their weaknesses,” and that “most of the time, they do the reading, but it’s not really the talking.”

When asked whether they think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial, the tutors agreed that, in most cases, students are benefiting, but in some cases they are not. Sarah asserted that “some students are really benefiting long-term” and this is clear in the fact that “their mistakes [...] are not repetitive.” Along the same lines, Dina affirmed that students are benefiting, and this shows in the improvement Dina finds when the student visits again. Nevertheless, Sarah does not think that those students who come only for editing purposes “actually [benefit] long-term.” Mona stated that students “have an initial incentive which is the grade,” but those who come several times “realize the long-term value rather than the grade only.” Rima said that “when it

comes to language, [she] doubt[s] [students] benefit that much unless they really work for it.” Carla added that “some [students] come back with the same questions and the same difficulties.”

In the fifth question, the tutors agreed that the students are generally satisfied with the tutorials. After talking about one session as an example, Rima asserted that, midway through the session, she feels the “student is relaxed [and] is more comfortable with [her].” Carla added that “whenever [students] leave, they leave feeling that they got the answers or they know how to do something they did not know before.” She also stated that “some of them [...] come back to show that they took good grades or acceptable grades [...] on assignments they thought they would not get a good grade on,” and “they are telling their friends and their friends are coming.” Moreover, Sarah said that the students express their gratitude before they leave, most of the time,” and “in general, the regular students who come and come again” are truly satisfied. Nevertheless, Mona stated that those students who “did not want to spend much time but wanted the benefits of it” i.e. “those who were having quick expectations and were only interested in the grade [...] and [in] passing the course” were not satisfied. Along the same lines, Sarah declared that students “who come with a wrong idea of the writing center” leave feeling unsatisfied.

When asked whether they were satisfied with the tutorials, all the tutors agreed that they were satisfied. Sarah thinks that they are “doing a good job” at the center. Rima and Carla said that they get to work “one on one” with the student and to “focus on that student’s needs”, and this is something that cannot be regularly carried out in the classroom. Rima also stated that she gets to “see the impact” and Dina said that seeing “all these improvements” is incredibly “rewarding.”

In the last question, most of the tutors agreed that some improvements can be added to the tutorials. Rima declared that “students should know what is expected of them” in their assignments as, most of the time, students go to the center expecting the tutors to tell them what is expected and this is “a major loss of time,” and it makes the session less effective. Rima also worries in this case that the instructor’s expectations might end up being different from those of the tutor. Carla would like to see the students “more engaged” and not there only “because they want a better grade” but because they want to improve their writing ability in general. Mona suggested giving a “follow-up session” since one session is not always enough to address a “particular problem area.” She also proposed having “workshops on certain weaknesses among Arab speakers of English.” Moreover, she stated that additional resources like thesauruses and dictionaries are needed. Sarah noted that most students “come to the center a day before they have to turn in their assignments,” so both the student and the tutor feel pressured and end up working for the purpose of editing that assignment instead of actually explaining ideas and explaining things for long-term benefit.” This is why she recommended working in “smaller steps [or] portions,” and that the students “visit the writing center more than once for the same assignment.” She also suggested “adding new kinds of tutorials to [the] center.”

#### **4.4 - Anecdotal Record**

Being a tutor at the writing center myself, I kept an anecdotal record of important sessions that reveal the effectiveness of the writing center. Following are some of those anecdotes.

#### **4.4.1 - Anecdote # 1**

A student had to prepare a speech for an oral communication class. She told me she was nervous about students getting bored and not understanding her message. The presentation she prepared was about schizophrenia, which is, as she said, a topic that not everyone would be interested in. She was interested in this topic because she is majoring in psychology. So, we worked on creating a clear outline, emphasizing the sections we thought the audience would be most interested in, and on simplifying the language by using straightforward sentences and simple terms that her audience would understand and as a result, listen to her presentation and not get bored. Towards the end of the session, I told her not to worry and that she would be fine. I also gave her some tips to use during her speech. She came back the next week, and with a smile, she told me that her speech went fine and that she did well. Also, she visited the center again to work on the second speech, and she told me that she got a high grade on her first one.

#### **4.4.2 - Anecdote # 2**

A student came in and seemed nervous to me. He had to write an article critique. As he read, his cheeks became red, and as we talked, he barely looked at me. His English was fine, but he wanted a second opinion on his critique. So, we discussed some points that he could elaborate on to strengthen his argument. Towards the middle of the session, the student seemed more relaxed; he was looking at me more and smiling from time to time. We had covered most of the critique by the end of the session. Before he left, he told me exactly how he will improve his argument and what areas he will work on. The student came the next day having worked on what we discussed the day before, and we went over the rest of the critique.

#### **4.4.3 - Anecdote # 3**

This student visited the writing center five times this semester and nine times during the fall semester. We worked together on summaries, reflections, research papers, and on an argumentative essay. During the fall semester, we worked on different areas but with more emphasis on sentence structure, sentence clarification, subject-verb agreement, word choice, documentation, and punctuation. During the spring semester, the emphasis was mainly on organization and development. As the sessions progressed, I noticed that her assignments are improving; the assignments contained fewer mistakes and better sentence structure and word choice. The improvement is clear in the report forms that the tutor fills in at the end of the session; the comments become fewer from visit to visit. Also, one tutor had commented on the student's third visit that they worked on "Arabism;" the student had directly translated some expressions from Arabic to English. There is no mention of "Arabism" in the tutors' reports later on. In one of the sessions towards the end of the spring semester, I told her that her language has greatly improved. She agreed and told me that her main purpose of visiting the writing center now is to make sure that anyone who reads her paper gets her message.

#### **4.4.4 - Anecdote # 4**

A nursing student came from another campus (that does not have a writing center yet) to check a summary she had written of a research article. She seemed stressed about the assignment because she had to submit it the following day and the teacher was not satisfied with the summary. I noticed that she had gone into much detail in the methods section, while in the results section, she had written just a few sentences. So, I advised her to further summarize the methods section and to elaborate on the

results section. She agreed that this would improve her summary, and she seemed satisfied with the feedback she received. At the end of the session, before she left, with a smile, she asked me about my name.

#### **4.4.5 - Anecdote # 5**

A student had to write a term paper for an English course. She was lost; she couldn't choose three arguments to support her claim and she had to submit the paper the next day. She had worked on it during the whole semester; choosing the topic, writing an outline, choosing credible sources, and note-taking. Her English was good, but she had to craft her third argument in a way that it was truly argumentative. So, we worked on that. At the end of the session, she seemed more relaxed, and she knew what she had to do.

#### **4.5 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reported the findings of the study. In the next chapter, I analyze those results.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### **5.1 – Introduction**

In this chapter, the data collected is analyzed and discussed. The major findings are related to the literature.

#### **5.2 - Questionnaire**

As the results show, the majority of students (47.6%) sought the writing center for help in revising grammar, spelling and punctuation. This concurs with the misconception about the writing center as a “grammar garage” that Carino (2002) condemned. The percentage of help needed in grammar is the same as the percentage of help received. This indicates that the students who sought the writing center for help in grammar did receive the help they needed. Nevertheless, the percentage of help in the areas of content and brainstorming significantly increased from help needed to help received by around 10%, and help in the area of organization of ideas increased by around 7%. This means that students usually receive help in the areas they need help in, and they also receive additional help in revising content, brainstorming and organizing ideas.

The high percentage of students who were highly satisfied with the session shows that the writing center is effective. In addition, the high percentage of students who strongly agreed that the tutor answered their questions, that the tutor helped them improve their assignment, and that they received useful feedback on their writing hints at some kind of correlation between those three variables and the satisfaction of the

students. One might conclude that the stronger the students agree with the latter three variables, the stronger they are satisfied with the session. Moreover, the high percentages of students who strongly agreed that they will visit the writing center again for help in future writing assignments and that they will recommend the writing center to others show that students are truly satisfied about their visits to the writing center.

The last two items on the Likert scale were mostly left empty probably because they were not applicable. Nevertheless, among those who filled them in, 55.5% strongly agreed that his/her grades on papers improved due to their visits to the writing center, and 61% strongly agreed that the writing center has helped them to improve their writing ability in general. This shows how effective the writing center is. In addition, most of the comments at the end of the questionnaire show that the students are satisfied, grateful, and think that visiting the writing center is beneficial.

### **5.3 - Interviews**

Most of the tutors prioritize organization and the clarity of ideas. One tutor said that she prioritizes a good thesis statement, which shows that the student has a clear message and a central point. This is in parallel with the “writing center manifesto” (Robinson, 2009, p.71), which recommends that tutors deal with “higher-order concerns of focus, organization, and development” before dealing with “lower-order concerns of grammar and mechanics” (Blau & Hall, 2002, p.24). Nevertheless, one tutor declared that she gives both areas equal weight. This is in accord with Blau and Hall’s (2002) solution to the issue of non-native speakers who have a weak grasp of English and require more direction and coaching which is to address both concerns together. In this

way, tutors tackle global concerns, but they clarify some fundamental language problems first.

In addition, most of the tutors admitted that in some cases they do talk more than the student. One tutor asserted that students need the tutor “to say some things” and that if the tutor keeps quiet because that is what s/he is supposed to do, “in some cases, that’s not what the student wants.” According to another tutor, “students want to hear what [tutors] have to say” because they come to the writing center “seeking advice [and] help.” Even though what the tutors stated opposes writing center lore, which favors nondirective tutoring, it concurs with the empirical research findings and the results of Thompson et al.’s (2009) survey that indicate that tutors are not capable of avoiding directiveness. Moreover, the results of the latter survey reveal that tutors believe that an amount of directiveness is necessary, and that students often appreciate this directiveness.

When asked whether they think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial, one of the tutors asserted that many students who come to the writing center “have an initial incentive which is the grade.” Nevertheless, “those who come [several] times and keep coming back [...] realize the long-term value rather than the grade only.” This concurs with the findings of Robinson (2009) that show that as students visit the center more frequently, they start moving from being extrinsically to being intrinsically motivated. Students are usually extrinsically motivated when they want to meet their instructors’ demands and to eventually get a good result. Conversely, students’ intrinsic motivation generally comes from having their personal motives to work on their writing such as improving the way they express themselves.

Affirming that the students who visit the center are satisfied, one tutor stated that students leave the center “feeling that they got the answers or they know how to do something they did not know before.” This is in parallel with Harris’ (1995) assertion that despite the fact that most students visit the writing center because they are compelled to, they leave feeling that their visit was helpful and that they have more control over their writing. Another tutor said that, during the tutorial, students “share certain things that they don’t share in front of others because they feel that it’s private.” Along the same lines, Harris (1995) declares that as the tutorial proceeds, students start to talk with less restraint and more sincerity since they are outside the boundaries of the classroom.

Furthermore, two tutors stated that they were satisfied with the tutorials because they get to sit one on one with the student and to focus on that student’s needs. The teacher in a class usually cannot do this with every student in the classroom because of the large number of students. This is in parallel with the research on the writing center that indicates that tutoring has particular advantages when compared with other methods of teaching writing (Jones, 2001).

When asked whether tutorials can be improved, one tutor expressed concern regarding teacher’s expectations. She said that students need to know what is expected of them, because there might be a conflict in expectations later on. This is the “intellectual challenge” of the work of the writing center that Grimm (1999) pointed out; tutors have to meet the understandings of the teacher and the student and try to highlight where these understandings collide and the gaps appear. Another tutor said that she would like students to be more engaged and not there only to improve a grade but also to improve their writing ability in general. This is the goal that Robinson (2009)

suggests that the writing center should have which is to assist students in becoming more intrinsically motivated.

#### **5.4 - Anecdotal Record**

The anecdotes clearly show that we as tutors can employ the caring approach at the writing center due to the one-on-one nature of the tutorials. Pistone (2010) asserts that this approach creates a closer relationship between the tutor and the tutee, and this in turn helps in addressing the tutee's true needs and anxiety about writing in a more effective manner. Pistone (2010) even declares that students seek out tutors to lessen their anxiety related to their teachers' demands in the same way that clients go to psychologists to receive help in handling their anxiety and the obstacles they might be facing in life. This is obvious in the first anecdote in which the student was clearly anxious about her speech and needed someone to lessen her anxiety and to encourage her. Harris (1995) states that as tutors assist writers in matching what they have in their minds with what they have on paper, writers become more confident about their writing and more motivated to revise their papers. Moreover, the fact that the student in the first anecdote passed by the center just to tell me that she did well on her presentation shows that she is highly satisfied. Also, the fact that she got a high grade on her speech shows that the writing center is effective.

Sometimes, students need a small push, and that makes all the difference. For instance, in the fifth anecdote, I could see that the student had worked a lot on the paper and that she has a lot of good references to support her argument, but she needed a few pointers to help her focus her argument. Visiting the writing center helped her do that. The fourth anecdote has a similar case. The student had also carefully read the article

she had to summarize and had gone deeply into the details. I helped her by just giving her a few pointers on how to improve her summary. Moreover, towards the end of the session, I could see that the student in the second anecdote was more confident about his essay and that he knew exactly how to improve it. This concurs with Harris (1995) who asserts that students leave the writing center feeling that they have more control over their writing.

Moreover, the third anecdote clearly shows that, as the sessions progressed, the student moved from a focus on lower-order to a focus on higher-order concerns. This is in parallel with Robinson's (2010) findings that reveal that, as the students' visits to the center become more frequent, they move from a mere focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation into a more "holistic approach" to the process of writing. In this way, they would be moving from being extrinsically to being intrinsically motivated. Robinson (2010) adds that instead of promoting dependency, the students' work at the center assists them in becoming more independent writers. The fact that the number of visits of the student in the third anecdote to the writing center during the spring semester has decreased as opposed to the number of visits in the fall semester shows that she is becoming more independent as a writer. This adds to the effectiveness of the writing center.

### **5.5 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analyzed and discussed the data collected. I also related the major findings of the study to the literature.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

#### **6.1 - Conclusions**

This study reveals that the majority of the students who visit the writing center at one university in Lebanon are highly satisfied with the tutorials, will visit the writing center again, and will recommend it to others. The results show that most students strongly agree that the tutor answered their questions, helped them improve their writing assignment and provided them with useful feedback on their writing. These results hint at some kind of correlation between the latter three variables and student satisfaction. Moreover, most of the students who filled in the last two items on the Likert scale strongly agree that their grades on papers have improved due to their visits to the writing center and that the writing center has helped them improve their writing ability in general. All of these results demonstrate the effectiveness of this writing center.

Furthermore, all of the tutors at the center are satisfied with the tutorials and agree that students are also satisfied most of the time. The tutors also agree that most students are benefiting long-term. Moreover, the tutors follow the general guidelines that are recommended by the writing center literature, but at the same time, they are flexible; they adjust their tutoring style to fit each student's needs and each situation. According to Blau and Hall (2002), "flexibility has always been the hallmark of writing center work" (p. 43).

Since writing ability in itself is hard to evaluate, it is difficult to assess the effect of the writing center on writing ability. Moreover, methodological concerns hinder research related to the writing center. These include the difficulty of gathering

participants from varied students who irregularly visit the writing center, and the difficulty of limiting the effects of other confounding variables. Even though tangible evidence cannot be easily obtained, the significance of writing centers is highlighted through the accounts of students who come to approach the writing process with less anxiety and more confidence (Jones, 2001). Jones (2001) states that several research studies have shown that visiting the writing center is considerably directly associated with the enhancement of student perceptions regarding the writing process. Harris (2002) states that it is usually agreed that writing center research will strengthen the writing center's status giving it "weight" and "substance," "will be the instrument of institutional change," and will create "new paths" (p.75).

## **6.2 - Limitations**

The relatively small number of questionnaires might be one limitation of this study. Still, the writing center under study has been newly established, and the number of students who visit it is still relatively small. Another limitation might be that the study was conducted over one semester only. These two limitations might have affected the accuracy of the study.

## **6.3 - Recommendations**

Future studies could be conducted over a whole year to have a greater number of student participants. Future studies could also attempt at investigating more deeply the reasons for the effectiveness of the writing center so as to draw more precise conclusions. These studies would help in further advancing the effectiveness of the writing center.

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## Appendix I

**Questionnaire****Writing Center Student Survey**

Please fill in this survey. All answers will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you.

**I. General Information**

1. Gender:   \_\_\_Male   \_\_\_Female
2. Major: \_\_\_\_\_
3. University Status: \_\_\_Freshman   \_\_\_Sophomore   \_\_\_Junior  
                               \_\_\_Senior   \_\_\_Graduate   Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many languages do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_
5. English is my (first/second/third) \_\_\_\_\_ language.
6. How many sessions have you attended at the writing center? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How frequently do you visit the writing center?  
       \_\_\_Several times a week   \_\_\_Once or twice a week  
       \_\_\_Every other week   \_\_\_Once a month   \_\_\_Once a semester  
       Other: \_\_\_\_\_
8. In what area (s) did you need help before the session?
  - Brainstorming (getting started)
  - Introduction
  - Conclusion
  - Organizing my ideas
  - Revising content
  - Revising grammar, spelling and punctuation
  - CV/cover letter
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
9. In what area (s) did you receive help during the session?
  - Brainstorming (getting started)
  - Introduction
  - Conclusion
  - Organizing my ideas
  - Revising content
  - Revising grammar, spelling and punctuation
  - CV/cover letter
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Please rank the following statements.**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I am generally satisfied with what went on during the writing session.				
The tutor answered the questions that I asked.				
The tutor helped me to improve my writing assignment.				
I received useful feedback on my writing.				
Feedback from the writing center gives me ideas and strategies that I could apply to other assignments in the future.				
Feedback from the writing center helps me recognize exactly what areas in my writing need to be improved.				
I will visit the writing center again for help on future writing assignments.				
I will recommend the writing center to others.				
<b>*If Applicable</b>				
My grades on my papers have improved due to my visits to the writing center.				
The writing center has helped me to improve my writing ability in general.				

**III. Please write down any additional comments or suggestions.**

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## Appendix II

### **Interview Questions**

1. Do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general? Why?
2. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation? What areas do you prioritize over others? Why?
3. Who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student? Who do you think should talk more?
4. Do you think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?
5. Are students satisfied with the tutorials? How does it show?
6. Are you satisfied with the tutorials? Why?
7. Do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

### Appendix III

#### **Transcription of Interviews**

##### **Interview with Rima (around 15 minutes)**

Leen: This interview is for my project on the writing center. Shall we start? The first question is do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's um writing skills in general and why?

Rima: Okay. First of all. Um I always try to see what the original instructions were meaning what did the instructor ask for before looking at the students paper. I try to get the feel for the assignment. If it's something that I've taught before like in English 202 I find myself asking more questions because I want to make sure that my expectations are going to be the same as that of the teacher's. Sometimes it isn't. Um I've had experiences with students who've given me work that am not familiar with whether it's for political science or um theatre and in that case I need to know what it's about. And then I try to see the paper itself and whether it does conform to these guidelines before looking at the details and the words and the sentence structure.

Leen: So you try to check the assignment itself.

Rima: Yes before looking into the details because if you check the details then the sentences might be perfect but that's not what the instructor wanted to start with. So first of all we deal with the big picture and then we go on to the minor details.

Leen: So um the second question. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation? What areas do you prioritize over others and why?

Rima: Ok. The first thing is a good thesis. Making sure the student has a main point a message that he or she is trying to convey and then after that I look at organization meaning are the ideas organized in a way that um would allow the student to meet the purpose? And then after that it's mostly and this is something I've encountered and it's close to organization the idea of repetition where you have a student who just seems to go around the issue and then touches upon it slightly goes on to another issue and then goes to the first point and that is organization and in a way also repetition. But the major problem always ends up being language meaning the words the the vocab the diction that the student is trying to use. Most of the time you have to ask what he or she meant because you don't really get the point because of the language difficulties. Um the one thing that I rarely have time to actually sit and focus on is punctuation and minor editing because by the time we deal with the main part the major problems those end up being left and I try to ask students to come back if they need to.

Leen: Ok. The third question. Um who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student? And who do you think should talk more?

Rima: Ok. Um the cliché answer to this would be the student should talk more. But it depends. Um when you have a student who comes in and they're so um um. I was just talking to Nada (director of the writing center) and I said in some cases I feel that I'm more like a therapist than a tutor meaning that the student needs needs to hear that what they're doing is right that they're on the right track they need you to say some things. If you just keep quiet because that's what you're supposed to do in some cases that's not what the student wants. Yesterday there was the girl that passed by and she she's stressed out the way she's dealing with me is not that of someone who's in control. She's worried she feels that she's at a loss. She needed to hear something from me. If I had just done the cliché thing and sort of listened to her it would've been um it would've been awkward especially since she felt she knew nothing. So in that case yes I think I ended up talking a little bit more than she did but that's because when I first asked her what the assignment was what she was supposed to do I don't know I don't know that was her initial like I don't know she was resisting actually telling me something. Later on when we started talking about this she ended up knowing but it was stuff that I pulled out it wasn't stuff that she was willing to give on her own. In that case yes I agree I spoke a little more than she did. In other cases I've had students especially if they know what they're supposed to do they read it out. I remember a graduate student who was summarizing a chapter she was doing most of the reading. I would stop her at some points she would tell me yes I think there's repetition here maybe I can use a different word. So it was more her. And it depends on the stage. If the student is still in the early stages and they clearly have they clearly need guidance to what they're supposed to do you ask them questions but then you end up also giving some answers.

Leen: Um do you think students are really benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?

Rima: Yes. Um if a student um has a specific idea of what he or she wants for example a CV they come in they have no clue of what to write what to do you give them a few pointers suddenly they're doing it on their own. In that yes they are benefiting. If a student needs help with citations um how to insert a reference maybe you help them once. This happens with a lot of students. I find them saying ah okay so that's like the other one alright thank you you don't need to help me with this now I can do it on my own. Can you show me the online? Can you show me this? You just give them a few pointers and they will be able to do it on their own. Students who aren't really sure of what's required of them. Yesterday for example she wasn't really sure of what to do in a response a response to literature with just a few comments I gave her just a few guidelines she ended up saying oh so I can do this in that way. So in a way they are learning. But students who come here expecting to improve their language I doubt in a way they are using us to improve their grade. Some of them if they do it on a regular basis I remember a student of mine he was in English 101 and he came to the center and

he worked with Mona for the entire semester and he would work on every essay so he'd have the first in class and then he would come over here and work on a final draft that was not graded. By the end of the semester he was able to write an essay that you know got a passing grade and he passed English 101. If he hadn't done this he probably wouldn't have passed. But that's a special case. So when it comes to language I doubt they benefit that much unless they really work for it.

Leen: Okay. Are students satisfied with the tutorials and how does it show?

Rima: Um sometimes um. I remember a student a couple of weeks ago and he had a set idea of what he wanted in his essay and he knew that his thesis wouldn't have been enough for him to develop a full essay that would be you know with three body paragraphs and all that. He refused initially he refused to change anything. So it was sort of okay he knows that what he has isn't enough he refuses to make any changes and it was a bit of a barrier so after a lot of discussion and he was adamant about it no no no I like my thesis the way it is I don't want to add anything but my friend you know to have a little bit more. Um after that you could sense meaning at some point I think midway through this was for an entire hour midway through after around 25 minutes you could sense that there's a break. And you could sense it the physical the body gestures everything suddenly he's interacting. My experience has been I don't need to wait for the evaluation sheet at the end. You can sense that a student is relaxed is more comfortable with you and that shows a bit. I feel that the more a student seems defensive I would understand it at the beginning when they're still worried they feel that they're here most of them have this preconceived notion that I'm here it means am weak. So in the beginning I understand that sort of defence mechanism but then at least midway through they start to relax and towards the end when you feel that they're going and they have a mission. So they're telling you okay yes am going to do this now and then I'll come back and fix that. Then you know that they're on the right track.

Leen: Um are you satisfied with the tutorials and why?

Rima: Um again. Yes. I like what am doing here. I get to work one on one with the student. I get to see the impact. It's not something that usually happens in the classroom because of the number of students that you have. It used to happen with me in the office and the one on one interaction is fruitful. So yes.

Leen: Um the last question. Do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

Rima: Um I think students um should know what is expected of them. This has been a major problem.

Leen: You mean in the writing center?

Rima: In the writing center and in their own classes. I mean most students come here not only without a draft but I mean it's fine if you don't have a draft you tell them write

a draft and come back but they don't even know what is expected of them in the draft. Is it their fault? Is it the fault of their instructors who didn't give them set guidelines? I don't know. But most of the time they come here and expect us to tell them and that is a major there's a major loss of time. If you're giving a student 60 minutes you'd rather spend the first 15 minutes just trying to get to know what they're working on because they're lost. This isn't in all cases but in some of them. That's where I feel we're not being as effective and again there's the worry that since they don't know what's expected of them maybe you're going to be giving them advice on the major content and their instructors won't agree. At least let them know what's expected what the assignment is and that's not our responsibility. This is making some sessions less effective.

Leen: Thank you so much.

Rima: You're welcome.

**Interview with Carla (around 7 minutes)**

Leen: This interview is for my project on the writing center. Shall we start?

Carla: Yes.

Leen: The first question. Do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general and why?

Carla: Okay. To start. I focus on the paper that the student brings with him or her because the paper can give us give me information about the errors recurring errors the difficulties that the student is facing and then from that I move on to ask the students about for example what he or she is seeking to improve and we work on these things but the starting point is the paper

Leen: Okay. Number two. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation and what areas do you prioritize over others and why?

Carla: I think the most important area is organization and planning before content because you can teach a student how to think but it takes a lot of time and it can't be achieved in one session especially at the writing center but what we can work on is how to the how to part how to express information or an idea how to put the information in the clearest way possible and sometimes if the idea is not that brilliant if it is written in a clear way it is something that does not bother the way a very maybe a very interesting idea is written in a very dull or confusing way. So I focus more on the skills that have to do with grammar sentence structure organization because these are also the skills that can be used later on.

Leen: Okay number three. Who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student and who do you think should talk more?

Carla: Unfortunately it's me. Okay I do the talking but it's only because the students want to hear what we have to say they come here seeking advice seeking help. Um now I cannot say we do um we have an equal amount of talking um they ask questions and we provide answers that's what happens and the answers are usually longer than the questions. I think we should work on making or having students express themselves more.

Leen: Okay. And does it happen all the time? Meaning do you talk more?

Carla: It depends on the student by the way. There are students who only have one problem and they are ready to hear you out and there are others who are inquisitive and they keep on asking questions and they want to learn more and so it depends on the character of the student.

Leen: Okay. Um number four. Do you think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?

Carla: Um I donnu if they are truly benefiting from each tutorial because some of them come back with the same questions and the same difficulties while others come back with other questions concerning other areas. So again I think it depends on the student but one of the things that am noticing is that they do come back which means that they know they are finding the answers and they are getting some the help that they sought. So it is beneficial for them.

Leen: Okay. Number five. Are students satisfied with the tutorials and how how does it show?

Carla: They are satisfied actually because um from a personal point of view whenever they leave they leave feeling that they got the answers or they know how to do something they did not know before um also some of them not a lot but some of them come back to show that they took good grades or acceptable grades or passing grades on assignments they thought they would not get a good grade on. So they are benefiting and they're also expressing this several times and they are telling their friends and their friends are coming. So they are benefiting.

Leen: Okay. Are you satisfied with the tutorials and why?

Carla: Am very satisfied because it's it's very different from teaching in the classroom. You get to sit with one student and focus on that student's needs and this is something that you can't do to every single student in the classroom. And this way the student is getting exactly what he or she is seeking and that's why when you're tutoring you can you know on the spot you can give them these tips and these the advice that you can't give when you are in the classroom. And they share certain things that they don't share in front of others because they feel that it's private.

Leen: Yes. Okay. The last question. Do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

Carla: Um. Actually I think. Everything can be improved. But it doesn't mean that what we have right now is not um is not good. It's actually good. Um I haven't thought of this but if I mean one of the ideas that I have in mind is basically how can they be improved um maybe the student can be more engaged. Um we don't I mean I think the student does not have to feel that he or she is here just to improve a grade. I would rather want to see students here because they want to improve themselves not because they want a better grade. So I donnu how this can be achieved but we should try to work on that.

Leen: Okay thank you so much.

Carla: You're welcome.

**Interview with Mona (around 10 minutes)**

Leen: This interview is for my project on the writing center. Um. Shall we start?

Mona: Okay sure.

Leen: The first question. Do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general and why?

Mona: The paper itself will be like a sample of what the student can do or what the student's proficiency is like in terms of writing mechanics writing fluency and the weaknesses or strengths will stand out. But it's a good starting point. So I do focus on it especially on the first meeting with the student if the student is someone I don't know it can give me a brief idea of his or her capability linguistic capabilities or problems. And from there I can tell something about their writing skill so it's not really the only measuring tool but this is like how I know the person. I know nothing about the person. The student might be anyone coming from any course and I have no clue about their background and I don't even know except from the first initial form which course they are placed in it will give me a brief idea but not specific details about their weaknesses and the like a writing sample is good enough to do that.

Leen: Okay. The second question. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation and what areas do you prioritize over others and why?

Mona: Personally or as they requested?

Leen: Um both. You can tell me both. What they requested and what you prefer.

Mona: Of course I start with the holistic part to check the meaning versus organization and then I move to the mechanics if they are in the way of um misunderstanding or misleading the reader so there is the idea of reader versus writer. Um meaning is important. We're not only focused on grammar or mechanics but if that impedes comprehension of course I do.

Leen: So you start with grammar if it impedes

Mona: Um no if after we look at it as a whole if the grammar is in the way of understanding the whole piece this is when I do look at it.

Leen: Okay but you start with organization content

Mona: Yes. As a piece as a whole.

Leen: And why did you ask me in the beginning if it is about what they asked you or what you do. Is there a difference?

Mona: Because sometimes students come in worried about certain problem areas thinking that this is the only reason why they failed the paper but when they realize that it's the whole thing then they know how this affected that. The grammar part or the mechanics how it affected the meaning especially for example comma splice they don't see it as a problem they don't think this is in the way of. When they read and they realize that one paragraph is one sentence sometimes ah yes now I know where my problem is thinking that they got that meaning across but when they read it aloud and I don't understand they might feel it then.

Leen: Okay. Third question. Who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student and who do you think should talk more?

Mona: Sometimes it depends on the student.

Leen: Aha.

Mona: Some of them are assertive others are shy and afraid to show their weaknesses. Um most of the time they do the reading but it's not really the talking.

Leen: Aha.

Mona: I do the questioning part trying to elicit from them what they need. So maybe in that respect my talking will be more but trying to pull out things from them hoping that they will then take over.

Leen: Okay. Um.

Mona: Well it should be balanced who talks more. It shouldn't be like I never thought about it as one more than the other. If they feel the need and it gives them assurance fine and if I feel that there is something I don't understand then I have to say something.

Leen: Okay. Um. Do you think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?

Mona: Sometimes they want short-term benefits which is of course the first thing they think of is the grade and their upcoming essay or draft. But when they come back for another session and there's a similar error that they have done and they say ah yes you mentioned that last time this is when they see the benefit of it. So just like what immediate versus underlying causes of affected occurrence. They have initial incentive which is the grade but then those who come twice three times and keep on coming back then they realize the long-term value rather than the grade only.

Leen: Okay. Are students satisfied with the tutorials and how does it show?

Mona: Most of the time they are. I've had few cases of those who were not pleased with the result. Especially those who come back and stop by just to say what grade they got on the draft they worked on.

Leen: Okay. And those who weren't satisfied what bothered them?

Mona: Um. In the beginning I remember those who maybe did not want to spend much time but wanted the benefits of it.

Leen: Okay. Like an immediate cure.

Mona: Aha. Those who were having quick expectations. Those who were only interested in the grade and nothing else and passing the course.

Leen: Aha. Okay. Are you satisfied with the tutorials and why?

Mona: I am but sometimes I feel um maybe more than one session is needed for a particular problem area but they are pressed for time and they don't want to come back for that purpose only. So if there can be a follow-up session on one weakness maybe that's our next aim I mean what our next aim should be. To work on problem areas or to have some workshops on certain weaknesses among Arabic speakers of English.

Leen: Okay. This somehow answers the final question do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

Mona: Yes and with additional I think we need to have additional resources available for immediate use. Other than the online one.

Leen: Aha. Okay. Like what?

Mona: But we're still waiting for thesauruses dictionaries those help books that have tips.

Leen: Aha. Okay. Thank you.

Mona: Sure. Good luck.

**Interview with Dina (around 8 minutes)**

Leen: This interview is for my project on the writing center. On the effectiveness of the writing center. Um shall we start?

Dina: Yes.

Leen: Okay so the first question. Do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general and why?

Dina: Usually I focus on everything in his paper for example if on his skills and for example if he wrote he has a thesis statement in the introduction if he it wrote um if he wrote a complete introduction and how he has to narrow it down for example. If he has also the main topic sentences in each paragraph and supporting details and examples.

Leen: Okay. So you focus on the paper.

Dina: Yeah on the paper and at the same time I realize that he has problems like subject-verb disagreement so I try to correct it for him and the next time I see that he has improved his skills.

Leen: Okay so you try to improve the student's skills through his paper.

Dina: Exactly. Yeah.

Leen: Okay. Um the second question. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation? What areas do you prioritize over others and why?

Dina: Yeah first I start with the organization of the paper. I find it the most important part of the paper. And yeah as I told you the presence of the thesis statement and the topic sentences. And the his ideas I look at his ideas also if they are lacking or if they are coherent. Um and then and then I look at the grammar and the spelling mistakes.

Leen: Okay.

Dina: And punctuation also. I find many students who have punctuation problems in their essays.

Leen: But you look first at the content organization and then the

Dina: Exactly. Yes.

Leen: Okay. Um number three. Who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student and who do you think should talk more?

Dina: Yeah. Usually I ask students questions and read first the paper aloud and we discuss it by asking the student questions and he or she answers me by looking at the paper and um

Leen: Who do you think talks more?

Dina: Um the student talks more and I think that the student has to talk more than the tutor because I have to understand his problem in the paper um all kinds of problems he or she encounters and I have then to improve this paper by asking the student questions.

Leen: What if the student is really weak and he needs um guidance and tips? What do you do?

Dina: Yeah in this case I talk more than the student and I try to show him the mistakes on the paper and let him try to correct these mistakes by himself. But sometimes the student this is the problem um the student sometimes does not know how to correct his mistakes so I have to sometimes tell him the answer.

Leen: Okay. Um four. Do you think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?

Dina: Yeah I find that they are benefiting I have an example of a student who was very very weak and mainly his words English words are not correct and he has so many problems with everything subject-verb disagreement punctuation but it's really good that the organization is good um so all his English words are weak so I I try to improve these his language and try to give him the right words and everything and then I tell him that these things he has to correct them in the whole paper later and then he comes another week for example and I find an improvement some improvement. Um and also I find some improvement in other things I corrected for him throughout the paper. So I I feel happy about it. Um about this improvement.

Leen: Aha. Okay. Um are students satisfied with the tutorials? How does it show?

Dina: Um. Well for example when this student comes back to me specifically and wants me to correct again for him the paper and discuss it together well I find that he is was very satisfied last time with the session together and he even tells me that he improved and he was satisfied with it. Um yeah so that's it.

Leen: Okay. Are you satisfied with the tutorials and why?

Dina: Yeah I am satisfied of course. Um mainly I am satisfied because I find it's very rewarding in fact and I find all these improvements and how the papers become better written. Yeah so this is how I feel rewarded and really happy.

Leen: Okay. The last question. Um do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

Dina: Um. Well in fact I don't think that they really need to be improved because I think that the writing center now is well equipped with everything. Um we have everything. We have handouts for example sometimes we show the students these handouts and they benefit from them to improve their papers such as if they want to write a CV and if they want to write a paragraph so these handouts help them a lot. Um

Leen: Do you think there is anything missing? Or would you like to have something else?

Dina: No I think I mean now everything is great at the center and we have more students who come. Um so I don't think there is anything I would like to improve.

Leen: Okay. Thank you.

Dina: You're welcome.

**Interview with Sarah (around 12 minutes)**

Leen: This interview is for my project on the writing center. Shall we start?

Sarah: Yeah sure.

Leen: Okay. Um the first question do you focus on the paper that the student has worked on or on the student's writing skills in general and why?

Sarah: Well definitely if the student comes with a paper or a piece of work usually writing um we do I do focus on it somehow because that's the only evidence of the student's level of writing that I have with me especially if the student is here for the first time. Um from that paper or that piece of work we move into the student's general writing skills or the writing problems. Um but yeah I have to say that we do focus on the piece of writing that the student comes with because that's the purpose of the student's visit to the writing center and that's the only thing we know about the student.

Leen: Okay. Um the second question. What areas of writing are you mostly concerned with: organization, content, grammar, spelling or punctuation? What areas do you prioritize over others and why?

Sarah: Usually it depends on the student. Um some of them um come specifically for grammar spelling and punctuation um others come for content and they ask questions about content um and when I say content usually it's the organization of ideas what comes first what should be left at the end um content matter as such I don't think we we're supposed to work on that.

Leen: Um like ideas. Are they well developed?

Sarah: Yeah yeah. That definitely we do work on. It depends on the student what he or she is looking for. Um some of them come with a clear vision of what they want others it depends on the work. Usually it's a combination of both content and language editing.

Leen: And which do you start with? Which do you prioritize over others?

Sarah: Um. Well I have to say since this is the writing center and not the student's teacher to evaluate the paper I do give both equal I don't want to say that I prioritize content over grammar and spelling because the purpose is to help in both areas I guess so yeah I do I do spend equal time. Am not gonna say that less time should be spent on organization and grammar and punctuation. Do you get me?

Leen: So you spend equal time on the different areas grammar content.

Sarah: Definitely definitely. Sometimes I stress more grammar and spelling punctuation. Um because I believe that content is sometimes is to be left to the teacher of the class. Do you understand what am saying?

Leen: Yeah. I mean content like.

Sarah: Yeah development of ideas like if there should be let's say if in an essay and this paragraph needs more support sometimes I don't mention this I don't mention this unless the student asks does this paragraph need more support because again am not the teacher and I don't think that is my um um I don't have the right to to pinpoint such things unless the student asks me or if this is extra work that the student is doing otherwise no I don't say this content is enough is not adequate you need to add more support no. I never heard myself saying that.

Leen: Okay. Um number three. Who do you feel talks more during the session: you or the student and who do you think should talk more?

Sarah: Well. Since we have this policy that the student has to read his or her work at the center um the student makes most of the talking or the reading in that case um I try to when when I when we um when I notice a mistake any sort of mistake in the student's writing I stop them I make them repeat or reread the sentence I try to ask them what's wrong and what's really what I really find interesting is that very often they end up correcting their mistakes. So just by rereading the sentence they see that there is something wrong. And sometimes they read a sentence that has any type of error in it and they pause knowing that there is something wrong. They feel that there is something wrong and they look at me to confirm or to pinpoint the mistake. Um

Leen: What about the students who don't find out their own mistakes?

Sarah: Yeah definitely I ask them so why is there a comma right here? Or why or why did you use this word instead of that? Or what do you mean by this? Because sometimes it's not even English. So yeah I do ask them I do I do talk but again because they are reading their work they do most of the talking.

Leen: Besides the reading?

Sarah: Besides the reading um as I said I ask them I make sure that before I tell them the answer or before I even tell them what the mistake is I make sure I try to get out of them first.

Leen: Okay um number four. Do you think students are truly benefiting from each tutorial? If yes, how?

Sarah: Um I believe that we're doing our best. Um it depends on the student definitely. I know for a fact that some students are really benefiting long-term not just for a certain purpose of the paper itself. Um some students actually do take notes especially graduate students and serious students they take notes on the side. Um and I see that their mistakes do not are not repetitive throughout the course because they keep on coming with different assignments. Other students of course they come here um thinking that it's an editing center where we would edit their work. Even after we explain to them that this is not what we do um still they try to they they would work with you just to get their work edited and then they'd leave. So I don't think that these students are actually benefiting long-term. But our services are for everybody.

Leen: Okay. Um are are students satisfied with the tutorials and how does it show?

Sarah: Most of them are. I guess it shows in the survey in your questionnaire. Um they express their gratitude before they leave most of the time. Um some of them are not especially those who come with a wrong idea of the writing center. So we do um turn them away and they do get um upset and they also express that. But in general the regular students who come and come again. Um yeah I think they are really satisfied.

Leen: Okay. Are you satisfied with the tutorials? Why?

Sarah: Um. There's always place for improvement. But in general I think we're we're doing a good job. And every time we have a meeting we discuss things we notice what we've been doing wrong and we try to avoid that we're working on ourselves self-evaluating um the work our work. And that's it.

Leen: Okay. Um the last question. Do you think tutorials can be improved? If yes, how?

Sarah: Definitely. Definitely they can be improved. Um how that's a good question. Um there are several aspects that should be worked on. Um well I think that students um usually what students do for example is they wait until they either wait until the finish the whole assignment and then they come here with so many things to be worked on. This could be tiring for the tutor and for the student. Um I think what should be done is work in smaller steps portions. The student should visit the center more than once for the same assignment I believe to get a better and then the student then the tutor should explain something or what should be done and then let the students go home do that and then come back to pursue the work. What happens is that our students come to the center a day before they have to turn in their assignments so we're under pressure they're under pressure we end up um working for the purpose of editing that assignment instead of actually explaining ideas and explaining things for um for long-term benefit. This is one thing students should be told not to come to the center right before they have to submit their work. Another thing is um I believe that sometimes we're giving students a lot especially with APA and things like that. So should there be a comma here? And you or the tutor just answers by yes or no giving them the answer. I think these things should be researched by the students themselves so what we should do is just show them the website or show them a booklet APA booklet and then let them do the work. Um what else? Um maybe it's time we we start adding new um kinds of tutorials to our center. I know it's a writing center but just in um letting students leave when they come for other purposes like reading or um I donnu some PowerPoint presentations and things like that. I don't I don't see why we don't include that also. Maybe we should include this as well. That's it.

Leen: Okay. Thank you very much.

Sarah: Thank you.