How Developing a Network of Secondary School Writing Centers Can Enrich University Writing Programs

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This article describes how a university writing center developed a network that encourages middle and high schools to start and sustain peer writing centers. The benefits of this regional infrastructure can flow not only to the secondary schools but also to university writing programs, enhancing dual-enrollment initiatives, incoming student attitudes toward writing, preservice teacher education, graduate programs in writing studies, and recruitment of both writing tutors and adjunct faculty.

Many writing programs engage with their local communities through service-learning and community literacy initiatives (Amare and Grettano; Deans et al.; Long), concurrent or dual-enrollment programs (Hansen and Farris), high school-college articulation projects (Cox and Gimbel; Sullivan and Tinberg), and many other ways of going public (Rose and Weisser). One largely untapped potential is for university writing centers to take the lead in building, slowly and incrementally, regional infrastructures for starting and sustaining middle and high school peer writing centers. While this may seem an admirable project for writing centers to take up on their own in a spirit of public engagement, this approach has, we have found, implications for a range of ongoing and emerging writing priorities across our campus. In this article, we describe how, over the course of ten years, our public university has developed a network that encourages middle and high schools to found peer writing centers; why we frame this as a regional network rather than as a set of binary partnerships; and how we see our network contributing an array of complementary benefits for university writing programs that include enhancing the quality of dual-enrollment programs, shaping student attitudes about writing, cultivating a more qualified pool of local adjunct faculty, and enriching a rhetoric

and composition graduate program. Ultimately, we propose that other colleges and universities consider replicating or adapting our model. Even a relatively modest investment in regional infrastructure can provide just the right nudge for secondary schools to start and sustain peer writing centers, which in turn can influence the ecology of writing instruction at the sponsoring university.

The idea of writing centers in secondary schools is not new. Some high schools have been engaged in that enterprise for more than twenty-five years (Farrell), although the idea has benefited from renewed energy over the last five years. Middle and high schools have been founding more centers. We have recently seen the national, teacher-led Secondary School Writing Center Association emerge. High schools are likewise growing more visible in professional organizations such as the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) and its regional affiliates. The idea of universities collaborating with schools to start and sustain peer writing centers through binary partnerships is also more than twenty-five years old (Luce), and we can find several contemporary exemplars (Hansen et al.; Smith; "Skyline-Sweetland"; "U of A"). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this kind of cooperation is on the upswing; however, such partnerships—when viewed in the larger national context of writing centers across higher education—are still fairly rare, mainly because college and university writing centers have their hands full serving their immediate campus constituencies.

The model we present is a variation on the grassroots and binary partnership approaches, one keyed to cultivating a regional network with a university as its main node (we use "regional" here to mean an area within about a fifty-mile radius of a sponsoring university). Our initiative in northeast Connecticut includes three signature university activities: hosting an annual conference on secondary school writing centers; collaborating intensively with one new secondary school each year; and offering teachers involved in writing centers ongoing (though mostly informal) support. Our efforts have now touched more than fifty schools—many through thin, one-time encounters at our annual conference, although several through thick, ongoing relationships. We see success in the crackling energy of the annual conference, which has grown in popularity each year and now fills to capacity on the first day we open registration. We see success as well in the trajectories of individual students, particularly those who, having tutored in high school centers that we helped found, later enroll at our university and earn positions at our university writing center (some have even gone on, after graduating, to become teachers who direct their own middle or high school writing centers). The whole system works because we leverage the affordances of a university writing center, a National Writing

Project site, and local schools, all connected through a web of overlapping relationships that vary in strength and kind. To be sure, this model requires commitments from all involved, and some startup costs, but it is designed to begin small and grow.

What we will not do here is argue for the efficacy of middle or high school writing centers, deliver advice on launching them, nor detail methods for training precollege peer tutors. On all those topics, others have published excellent books (Farrell; Fels and Wells; Kent, *Guide to Creating*), articles (Childers, "Designing"; Childers, "Getting Beyond"; Childers, et al., "Secondary"; Childers, et al., "Developing"; Childers and Upton; Feltenberger; Greer and Trofimoff; Hansen et al.; Hodgdon; Hughes; Silva; Turner; Upton) and web resources ("High School Writing Centers"; "Creating a Student-Staffed Writing Center"; SSWA; "Writing Center Resources"). Instead, we chronicle how we have incrementally constructed a flexible regional infrastructure that invites schools with varying degrees of commitment to peer centers to explore, start, and sustain them.

Institutional Context and Origin Story

While the model we propose can be adapted to work in many different institutional circumstances, we should note a number of rather fortuitous factors that were part of our origin story. Our work at a flagship, land-grant state university with a large writing center and a vibrant National Writing Project (NWP) site presents an ideal context for public school-university initiatives that hinge on writing. A number of other factors also put wind in our sails: a cluster of faculty in rhetoric and composition who lend intellectual and practical support; colleagues in the school of education who run degree programs in teacher education that create a pipeline of preservice teachers interested in writing pedagogy; and an ambitious concurrent/dual-enrollment program that has long collaborated with high schools across the state to deliver college courses, including first-year writing. While this context has accelerated our progress, we think other writing centers can do what we did without these factors present.

The core drivers of this project are the University of Connecticut (UConn) Writing Center, the Connecticut Writing Project (a National Writing Project site housed in the UConn English department), and local schools.
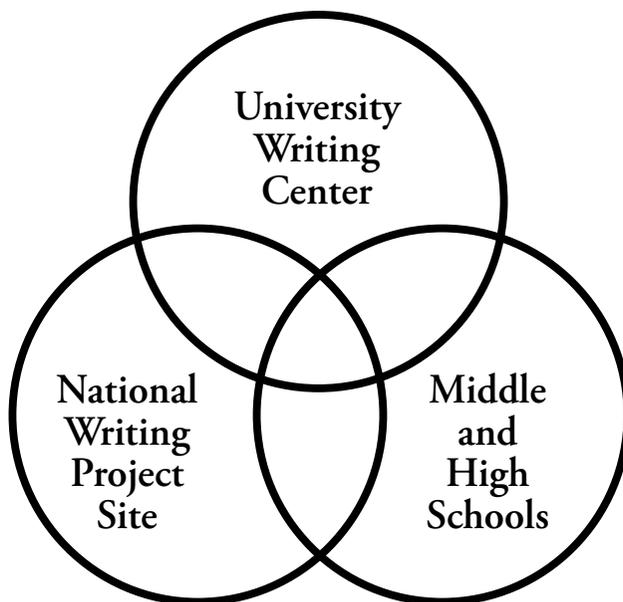
Figure 1: The three core partners of the Connecticut model.

The University of Connecticut Writing Center houses undergraduate tutoring, a writing fellows program, writing across the disciplines initiatives, and graduate writing support programs. It is directed by a tenured faculty member, has two graduate student assistant directors, and employs thirty peer tutors. The center was founded in large part to support the university's writing-intensive courses but has embraced a range of other partnerships across campus. Engaging in public outreach beyond campus was not part of the founding vision of the center. Instead, the impulse to collaborate with public schools emerged from within our staff. The first efforts were launched by an undergraduate tutor, Nina Rivera, who in 2004 wanted to reach out to her former high school in the urban core of Hartford. Supported by the then graduate student director of the writing center, Rivera recruited a small cohort of fellow undergraduate tutors to visit the school weekly to tutor high school students in academic writing, creative writing, and college application essays. After Rivera graduated, we kept the program going for two more years, yet because of both administrative changes at the high school and a rethinking of UConn's outreach philosophy triggered by the arrival of new faculty writing center directors, we discontinued the single school-university partnership (for more on the rise and fall of that initiative,

see Cella et al.). In its place, we decided to assist schools in launching their own peer writing centers.

For this new approach, the Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) proved a perfect partner. The CWP at the UConn campus in Storrs, Connecticut is what the National Writing Project calls a mature site, dating its origin to 1982. Thousands of Connecticut teachers have been influenced by the CWP's diverse professional development offerings. The cornerstone of these is, as it is at all NWP sites, an invitational summer institute where teachers from all grades (pre-K through college) and disciplines spend four weeks studying current research in writing pedagogy in a teachers-teaching-teachers model of professional inquiry. This model presents many advantages to our collaboration. One advantage is a stable pool of secondary teachers (mostly but not limited to English teachers) who have an ongoing relationship with our English department and who are current on research in the teaching of writing—teachers who especially value writing across the curriculum and recognize the cognitive and motivational roles that peers can play in a recursive and social writing process. Several members of the CWP network also teach (at their own schools) UConn's first-year writing course as part of a concurrent/dual-enrollment program.

University-community partnerships are built on relationships, and for decades, successive directors of the CWP have worked to develop personal and professional relationships with secondary school teachers. This is the second advantage in our collaboration. Had there been no local NWP site at UConn, the University Writing Center could have brokered its own relationships with local schools, or it might have turned to the teacher education programs on campus to build on their connections to schools. But fortunately we have been able to leverage CWP's infrastructure and our shared values.

As for the third and most important piece of the puzzle—local schools—we collaborate intensively with one per year, and they range from the large regional high school adjacent to our campus to an urban middle school thirty miles away. Since 2007 we have worked closely with twelve schools, although four have discontinued the centers we started together. Meanwhile, over the years more than fifty other schools from across the state have attended our annual conference.

The basic premise of our project is that well-established university writing centers that adopt a public engagement ethos can function as advocates for middle and high school centers in their region. Many colleges and universities have just the right affordances—established writing center administrators, experienced undergraduate and graduate tutors, campus spaces designed to host conferences, and cultural capital—to give them the

capacity to do this work, indeed to serve as the central node of a growing network. What we did not appreciate when we started this project is how many benefits can flow to the university once such a network is mature.

The Annual Conference

Universities are especially well prepared to host conferences, and we play to that strength. Our annual conference—three hours on one Friday morning each October—is a joyous event that brings together a mix of schools in the region—public and private, rural and urban, some with fully functional peer centers and some just tentatively exploring the prospect. Most schools bring one or two teachers along with ten student tutors or tutors-in-training (as our conference got popular, we had to cap the number of students each school could bring). Some schools send just a teacher or two, although they soon discover that the event is designed mainly for students. For our first conference in 2007 we had five schools and sixty participants. At our most recent, we had twenty-four schools and two hundred participants—and if we had not capped enrollment, we could have included nearly twice that number.

We initially imagined the conference as an opportunity for the partner schools that we had worked with one at a time to gather in one place to do some renewed training with UConn's tutors, share strategies across schools, celebrate successes, and stay energized, but we soon opened the event to all comers. Most schools that attend are repeaters who look forward to returning year after year, but we also see some schools drop off and new ones opt in.

The ethos of the conference is peer-to-peer learning and it has three basic movements: a keynote session and two breakout sessions. For the keynote, we gather all attendees into a theater-style room and three student teams, each from a middle or high school in the region, deliver 10-minute presentations. One team is always from the school we worked with intensively the prior year; the remaining two slots go to either past partners or other regular attendees. The students are in charge of the presentations (though coached by their teachers) and can focus on any dimension of writing center work. Some tell their origin stories or describe their centers; some model best practices—and satirize bad ones—with roleplays and skits; some create original videos; some engage the audience in question and answer. Many feature a sense humor, and all speak to how peers can play a valuable role in the writing process.

For the first 45-minute breakout session that follows the keynotes, we mix students from different schools into cohorts of ten to fifteen and send

each to a room where a UConn tutor leads a session on some aspect of writing center work (the conference coordinator sets out a consistent lesson plan for this each year). Meanwhile, the teachers gather with Tom from the UConn Writing Center and Jason from CWP to meet one another, share strategies, commiserate, and ask questions. We broker introductions and invite schools to connect with one another. We encourage those who have not already participated in a CWP summer institute to consider it. We offer to lend the university's cultural capital to their work, either by sharing our own tutor practicum course materials, or by having Tom and Jason come to their schools to help them persuade principals and department chairs that peer writing centers are viable and valuable. We also encourage teachers at schools with an established tutor practicum elective course to share their materials with those at schools without such an elective.

For the other breakout, we put teachers and their own students into a room together—again along with a UConn tutor facilitator—to do some strategic planning. Originally we did not do this, assuming that the participants did not attend the conference only to spend time with their own group. However, we soon realized that those at busy middle and high schools find it hard to schedule dedicated time to reflect and plan. This session, led by a UConn tutor, gives them a retreat-like space to consider their philosophy or reflect on how to take home what they have just learned at the conference. Teachers and students leave the conference not only with more strategies and motivation, but also with a sense that they are part of a larger movement, a larger network.

The Rotating Single-School Partnership

One of the first challenges we encountered when we embarked on this partnership was how to build sustainable relationships between the university writing center and the high schools we hoped to work with. In our network we try to encourage and sustain several kinds of relationships—between the university and secondary schools, as well as among the schools themselves—but the most obvious one is between the University Writing Center and whatever middle or high school is our primary partner in a given academic year. How do we initiate that relationship? The CWP's longstanding relationships with teachers in our region have been the most productive means for us to find fitting teacher and school partners. (And even when teachers find us by other pathways, we encourage them to enroll in a future summer institute.) But for universities without a NWP site, fruitful beginnings can emerge from personal relationships or one's own involvements in the local community (Goldblatt). Other options include

consulting campus community outreach offices or teacher education programs to build on their connections to local schools; another possibility is reconnecting with former tutors who teach in the region. Because our network is mature, secondary school teachers and administrators now take several pathways into it, as illustrated in figure 2.
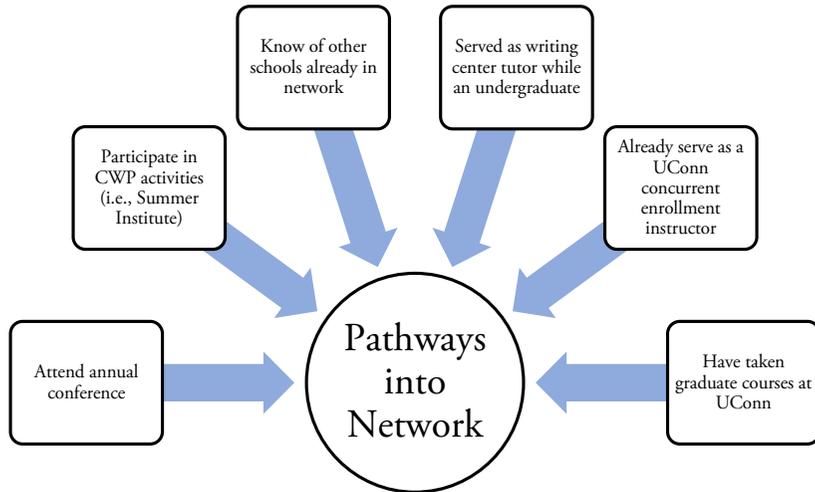
Figure 2: The pathways taken by middle and high school teachers into the writing center network.

Finding the right partner school each year takes some effort, tact, and luck, and at the final stage in that process the Writing Center and CWP directors call a meeting with all stakeholders—at minimum the teacher/organizer serving as the point person and the principal or another supportive administrator, but often additional teachers and administrators—to make sure expectations are clear and shared. Beyond that, we look for several elements: dedicated space for the writing center; a commitment to process writing; some experience with—or at least openness to—writing across the curriculum; and an understanding that ours is not a remedial model where the so-called good students help the so-called bad students, but one premised on the assumption that all students should participate in a collaborative culture of writing.

The University Writing Center's outreach coordinator then organizes the weekly visits to that school. The outreach coordinator is an experienced undergraduate or graduate tutor on the University Writing Center staff, typically (but not always) someone who is part of UConn's five-year Integrated Bachelor's/Master's (IB/M) teacher preparation program. (Dur-

ing our tutor hiring each year, we aim to recruit at least one such student so that we have a pipeline of English education majors—in our school of education's IB/M program, most students earn a dual degree in both English and secondary English education—who are potential outreach coordinators. Most go on to teach high school in our state, and already three of those have started writing centers at their schools.) We build the outreach coordinator role into the writing center budget, and that person recruits two or three fellow tutors to help with weekly school visits.

In our model, teachers at the middle or high school recruit a cohort of five to fifteen prospective tutors and arrange a weekly visit time when UConn tutors come to the school to work with them, starting in September and ending in March or April, and following the cycle illustrated in figure 3. During weekly after-school visits, the UConn team, in collaboration with the teacher contact at the school, leads workshops on tutor training. They draw directly on the practicum course that they had been required to take during their first years as university tutors, but they calibrate the course for middle or high schoolers. The budding tutors-in-training also attend the October conference, where they see presentations and get energized by interacting with tutors from other schools, many of which have established centers.

The weekly university tutor visits during that incubator year set a template for the school to develop its own training system or elective course for tutor preparation, which they will need when we depart. Not every school we have worked with has established a formal course, but we find it the best way to institutionalize good tutor training and make the workload more sustainable for the teacher who takes on the directorship of the school's center. Although there is often some concern within schools about adding an additional course, we find that such a course helps to build a more sustainable writing center. We also encourage administrators, teachers, and students to view the course as similar to our university's dual-enrollment courses, or at least as aligned with what we are already doing with our own university tutor training practicum. If more than one teacher at the school can be involved—including from departments outside the English department—all the better.

July
Selected teacher
may, if new to
CWP, attend
Summer Institute

September
Small team of
college tutors starts
weekly visits to
new school

May–June
Recruit new
teacher/school
through CWP
network for
following year

October
Teacher/director
and students
attend UConn
conference

March–April
Grand opening
of center

**November–
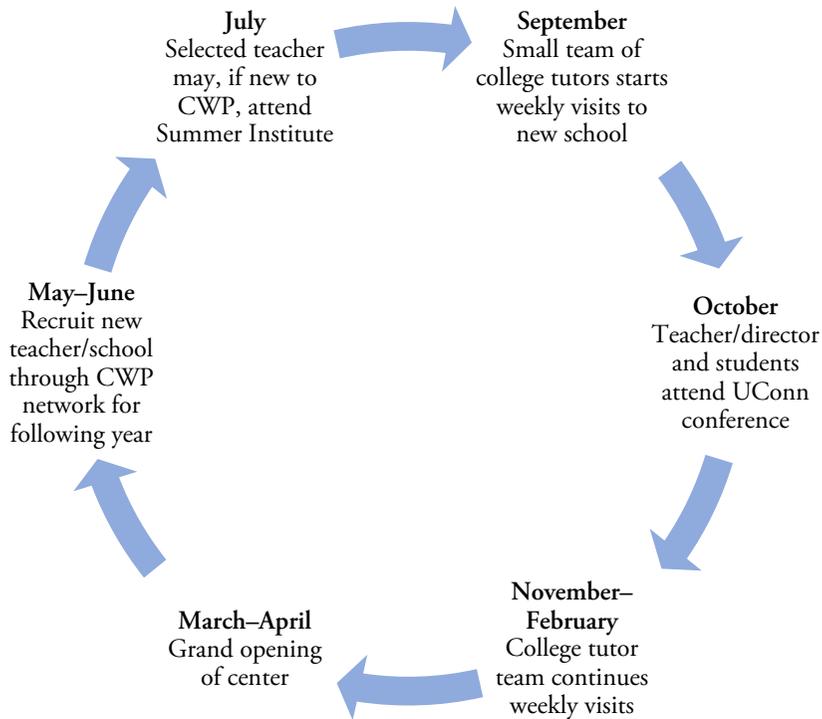February**
College tutor
team continues
weekly visits

Figure 3. The typical annual chronology of the university writing center/partner school activity.

Come spring, once the middle or high schoolers are trained in the basics of peer tutoring, the school hosts a grand opening, typically involving upper administrators and the local press. This marks the end of the weekly UConn visits; however, the school knows that its tutors are obliged to pay forward the training they have received by taking the stage as one of the keynote presenters at our annual conference the following October. Indeed, they will be invited back to our conference every year thereafter.

The Nature of a Network

Even though our activities have been conspicuously low-tech, the most fitting way to describe this initiative is as a *network*. Our project is all about connections among people and institutions. Some of those connections are centralized—that is, schools often look to the university for support or come to the university for additional tutor training—while others are distributed—that is, teachers at schools come to know each other, share

expertise, and even visit each other's writing centers. Some connections open channels for simple exchanges of information about how peer writing centers work, while others trigger multiple, complementary benefits (which we detail in the next section). Some connections have been consistently lit up. Others have blinked on and off, or even permanently off, typically as a result of administrative changes or teacher turnover.

Borrowing from Manuel Castell's notion that we are now a network society and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, we believe that thinking in terms of a network captures what we are doing and is attuned to the realities and affordances of our participating secondary schools. Many think of university-community collaborations in terms of partnerships (Brizee and Wells; Deans), but most such partnerships are binary. Moreover, partnerships rise or fall on the strategic and sustained buy-in of each partner, year after year; and while that buy-in can lead to terrific outcomes, the webbed, flexible, dynamic relationships of a network function differently, offering a wider range of ways to participate and different possibilities for growth.[1] Networks are assemblages of elements acting and reacting to one another—interactions, both predictable and unpredictable, among multiple people, objects, events, and institutions. As Latour writes in *Reassembling the Social*, a network is not just "a thing out there that would have roughly the shape of interconnected points, much like a telephone, a freeway, or a sewage 'network'" but is characterized even more by "the ability of each actor to *make* other actors *do* unexpected things" (129).

Networks need to be deliberately built and maintained—that is, they require some strategic and predictable infrastructure—but their everyday functioning is tactical and protean. For example, we have already noted how teachers take several different pathways into our network (see figure 2) and that their relationships to the university range from one-time conference attendance, to a full year of weekly school visits by our tutors, to year-after-year conference attendance and presenting. Likewise, schools have thin and thick connections to each other—from seeing each other at the annual conference, to visiting each other's schools to observe their center's action, to studying together for four weeks at a CWP summer institute.

We also need to note that in a network ecology, schools may toggle in and out of participation, or even drop out entirely, and when that happens, the network continues functioning. A school node might flicker and go dark when a key teacher retires or moves or when a new principal ushers in the next big thing. Such changes are fairly normal for schools, and they can bring a quick end to a binary university-school partnership, as we learned during our first outreach initiative, the tutoring program started by one of our tutors at her former school. Our record since then shows a fair num-

ber of promising starts followed by burnouts a few years later: of the twelve schools we have worked with intensively over the last ten years, four no longer have active writing centers. To see a third of our start-up efforts fail is, of course, disappointing for us, but by thinking in terms of a network, we have come to see such departures and fluctuations as natural. The network still holds up. After all, eight of those full-partner schools do continue to have sustained peer centers, and many more schools—including ones we could not have predicted—have experienced our conference as a vital turning point in launching their centers. We have even seen some of those schools inspire other schools near them to try a peer center. What makes this protean network sustainable is that it offers multiple ways in, multiple levels of involvement, gentle ways out, and chances to re-enter.

The scale of our regional network becomes more evident when actors involved are plotted on a map, as in figure 4. Some of the schools that have earned a dot on this map have very thin relationships with the university—they've attended the conference once, for example, and we do not actually know if they have centers up and running. Others have thick relationships with us—they started as one of our yearlong primary partners, we know that their centers are still thriving (or surviving), and we see them every year at our conference. The nature and strength of the peer, school-to-school connections likewise vary.
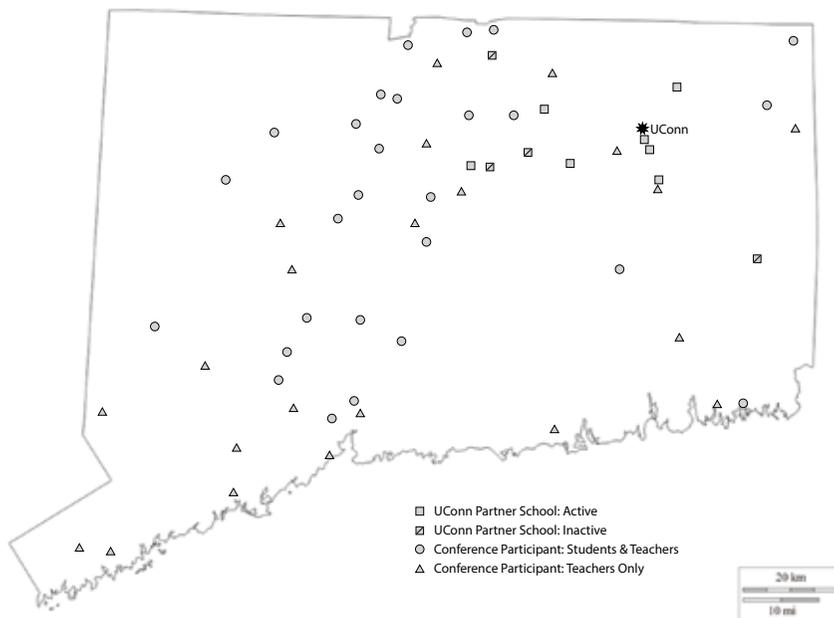

Figure 4. School-university writing center network as of 2017. For a more current, detailed, and interactive map visit https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/high-school-outreach/.

The flexibility, productive redundancy, and distributed quality of this network is evident not just in how teachers and schools connect but also in how college tutors circulate in and out. The tutors at our university writing center are not required to take part in this project—nor are they pressured to—but some do adopt thin roles, such as volunteering one morning per year to lead breakout sessions at our annual conference, and a smaller number opt for thick roles, such as joining the small team that visits our partner school each week, becoming our outreach coordinator, or conducting more formal research and reflection on secondary school writing centers, something several of our past outreach coordinators have undertaken (Bafumi and Isbell; Bottelsen; Czajka and Garzi; Rinaldo et al.). The understanding that variation in roles and commitment is natural is likewise essential for our own college faculty roles, given that this initiative is, for each of us, one of our many side projects. At times, such as in the fall when we host our conference, we engage with it intensively; at other times, it goes on the back burner at a low simmer.

Complementary Outcomes

University writing center directors might be thinking, "mentoring one school per year and organizing a conference and building a network sounds all well and good, but that must take lots of time, not to mention money, and both my time and budget are already pinched." Fair enough. We can do this project only because we frame it as enacting the mission of our land-grant university and more specifically of our respective units, but we also need to acknowledge that we would probably not be able to maintain it if we could not delegate the day-to-day responsibilities to the student outreach coordinator, an experienced graduate or undergraduate tutor (usually one with aspirations to teach high school as a career), and if that person's hourly wages could not be covered by the University Writing Center budget. Those wages and our time are the most tangible costs associated with investing in regional writing center infrastructure, but it is worth noting that a simple cost-benefit analysis that tallies how many writing centers get started doesn't account for the myriad other benefits of such a network. We have documented several less obvious but quite significant benefits, many of which dovetail with the interests of the university:

- **Seeding peer tutors for college writing centers.** For the last several years we have been seeing more and more students from Connecticut high schools with writing centers—many of which we have had a hand in founding—come to UConn and apply to work as tutors in our writing center. In essence, we have opened a pipeline of talented

students who arrive on campus already committed to process writing and practiced in peer tutoring. Even when high school tutors do not end up enrolling at UConn, we hear from our high school partners that many of their tutors go on to seek writing center jobs at their colleges. In essence, we've created a kind of minor league for college and university writing centers. Moreover, given how the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project has documented long-term benefits that accrue to college tutors (Hughes et al.), we would be wise to follow Andrew Jeter's lead in studying whether tutoring experiences in secondary school bring lasting intellectual, social, or attitudinal benefits (also see Dean).

- **Shaping (future) college student attitudes toward writing centers and writing process pedagogies.** A telling finding from Lori Salem's comprehensive study of which college students use (and don't use) the writing center at Temple University shows that SAT scores, parental education levels, and gender were all significant variables: those with lower SATs, those with parents who do not have a college degree, and women all used the Temple writing center at higher rates. She found that the attitudes of incoming students toward tutoring are also predictive. Temple administers a questionnaire to incoming students, and one question asks whether they see themselves as likely to use a tutorial service while enrolled at the university. Those who answered affirmatively did in fact use the writing center at higher rates. As Salem notes, this "shows that students' decisions about seeking tutoring were in place *before* they come to the university" (155). Middle and high school writing centers may favorably shape those attitudes toward both writing centers and interactive writing processes prior to college.

- **Lending greater integrity to dual/concurrent enrollment.** On our university campus, as on many others, a thriving peer writing center supports students who are enrolled in first-year writing (FYW). At UConn and across the nation, however, FYW is more and more being offered in high schools; in fact, UConn has one of the oldest and largest concurrent/dual-enrollment programs in the nation (here called Early College Experience or ECE). Students enrolled in FYW courses at high schools deserve writing center support too. Indeed, the CCCC *Statement on Dual Credit/Concurrent Enrollment Composition* makes this explicit: "Whenever possible, students should have access to the sponsoring institution's libraries and librarians for research, computer labs, tutors, and technical assistance, as they would if they were taking a composition course on the college campus. If distance or fee

structures do not permit such access, equivalent resources should be provided in the high school." The *CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing* echoes that concern (Hansen et al.).

- **Enriching graduate programs.** In our English department we have a rhetoric and composition doctoral track, and our relationships with high schools open more potential research opportunities for those students. So far, tracing the stages of developing the network has proven fertile ground for undergraduate tutor research as well (Bafumi and Isbell; Bottelsen; Czajka and Garzi). We also have an MA program that is open to teachers. High school teachers can take coursework that not only connects them to theories of writing that inform the work of writing centers and writing across the curriculum but also helps them qualify to teach our university's first-year writing dual-enrollment course in their high school, or even teach the FYW course on our campus. Our department is also deliberating about how we might develop a much more flexible MA for teachers, and our writing center network has informed that proposal. The network connects us to potential enrollees for that MA too.

- **Recruiting qualified adjuncts.** Our first-year writing program's need to hire adjuncts has been growing in recent years, and the web of relationships that has emerged from our collaborations has permitted our colleagues in that program to hire some high school teachers affiliated with the CWP and/or the ECE program to teach on campus. Although this is a tangential component that has emerged recently, it helps to improve high school-to-college articulation and build healthy writing cultures in both area high schools and the university.

- **Contributing to secondary school WAC and secondary-higher education articulation.** There is already strong precedent for linking high school writing centers to promoting and supporting secondary-level writing across the curriculum (Blumner and Childers, *WAC*; Brooks; Farrell-Childers et al.; Jensen; Kent, *Room 109*; Mullin and Farrell-Childers). We admire this work and see our network as participating in it. Indeed, writing across the secondary curriculum has always been central to CWP's mission. Among our most successful exemplars of writing center/WAC integration is the one at E. O. Smith High School, one of our earliest partner schools, where multiple English teachers and one social studies teacher have been responsible for founding the center, while a second social studies teacher has for several years taught a required course for the tutors-in-training. Furthermore, for those who care about high school-university articulation, the university has a less explicit but no less real stake in

secondary school WAC. For example, UConn requires undergraduates to engage explicitly with writing in the disciplines; therefore, the more we can promote statewide K–16 WAC activity, the more those future college students will be prepared for university expectations. And let's not overlook those students who are not college bound. As Deborah Brandt's *The Rise of Writing* documents, even the future jobs that those students occupy are likely to involve more writing than at any earlier point in US history.

- **Recruiting teachers for the CWP summer institute.** The signature activity of most National Writing Project sites is a summer institute, and the very same kinds of teachers who are invested in middle and high school writing centers are those that CWP wishes to attract. We have a consistent record of teachers moving from CWP into middle and high school writing center work, and vice versa.

- **Enhancing preservice secondary school teacher education.** Neither of us direct preservice teacher education programs on our campus, as that is done through our university's school of education. However, students in the IB/M program in secondary English education take a required course in composition theory with Jason; he also serves as an academic advisor to this cohort. This relationship with preservice English teachers enables him to help the writing center recruit undergraduate education majors (several of whom have later gone on to earn the position of outreach coordinator during the fifth year of their IB/M program). There might be even more potential to partner with teacher education programs. For other universities that wish to develop a writing center network—especially those that have no NWP site—colleagues in education could offer an alternate way of connecting to local schools and teachers.

A program that at first seems to be all about founding peer writing centers in local schools can turn out to have a positive multiplier effect for a cluster of university writing initiatives. These cumulative benefits add up, quietly shaping how writing gets taught and learned in our region.

An Invitation

As we noted earlier, our field has documented many kinds of school-university collaborations that involve writing. In a survey they conducted in 2010, Jacob Blumner and Pamela Childers find that most successful partnerships are voluntary, collaborative, reciprocal, local, and "integrated into the institutional fabric of all institutions involved" ("Building" 94). Notably, many involve National Writing Project sites.[2] However, less than ten

percent of those Blumner and Childers survey report that their programs have endured ten years or more. We have just crossed that threshold, and we think our network orientation has something to do with that.

The closest analogue to our approach may be at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, where Kirsten Jamsen serves as both director of the Center for Writing and co-director of the local National Writing Project site. From roots in both a Twin Cities network of college and university writing center administrators and the Minnesota Writing Project grew the E–12 Writing Centers Collective (*E* here for "early education"), an informal association of preschool, primary, and secondary school teachers invested in starting and sustaining writing centers in their schools. The E–12 Collective has been meeting at least once annually since 2010, and has involved as many as thirty schools and eighty people (with both Jamsen and Maggie Shea, who founded the now well-established Minnetonka High School Writing Center in 2007, integral to the leadership and often sponsoring the meetings). As with our network, there is a smaller subset of schools that are more intensely active, and a few of those bring their students to the university annually for tutor training workshops and retreats. In spring 2018, for example, the E–12 Collective hosted its first regional conference for secondary school writing centers at Shattuck-St. Mary's School (Jamsen; "E–12 Writing Center Collective").

No doubt there are many university-secondary writing center initiatives about which we are unaware, and there are, moreover, variations on our model that we can imagine: emerging networks to connect university, community college, and secondary school writing centers in a given locale; or feeder high schools to particular colleges that could be identified and divvied up among those colleges.[3] And as we have argued, participating colleges and universities—especially those with graduate, teacher education, and dual-enrollment programs—could benefit in a range of ways as their local networks mature. In our utopian vision, adjacent networks would grow to the point of overlapping with one another.

As for our own network, in recent years we have reached a saturation point. The 2017 and 2018 conferences generated greater demand than we could supply. More schools wish to work closely with us than we can handle, and schools distant from us have expressed regret that no similar infrastructure exists near them. In this kind of network, proximity matters. It is time, then, to light up new college and university nodes, to develop more regional networks.

Notes

1. We also see potential for modes of assessment and research that are attuned to thinking in terms of networks. Sociologists such as Latour have suggested how to study networks through the "tracing of associations" (5), and Jeff Rice has suggested how such tracing might specifically apply to writing programs.

2. Earlier in this article we mentioned the Secondary School Writing Centers Association, which started as a regional organization and is perhaps the largest network of high school writing centers. It emerged directly from teachers rather from university sponsorship but has a relationship with the Northern Virginia Writing Project. For more, information, see http://sswca.org. At the University of Maine, Rich Kent has organized secondary school writing center conferences and taught English education courses that focus on writing centers. At Michigan State University, Trixie Smith, who serves as both Writing Center Director and Director of the local NWP site, has helped several high schools start writing centers but has not sponsored a conference or regional network (Smith).

3. Many thanks to Kristine Hansen for suggesting these other possibilities. Also thanks to Rich Kent, who reviewed the manuscript at an early stage, and Kirsten Jamsen for her account of the E–12 Collective.

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