

SPRING 2019

RMWCA

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

LETTER FROM THE RMWCA PRESIDENT



It has been a banner year for RMWCA. For the first time, we officially have dues-paying members and, as of March 1, we have 242! RMWCA members can look forward to webinars for both peer tutors and directors such as our spring 2019 webinar with co-authors Lori Salem, John Nordlof, and Harry Denny on their recent article “Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that was so bad: Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working Class Students in Writing Centers Writers.”

Along with the Colorado Wyoming Writing Tutor Conference, we recently gathered together in Denver for TutorCon 2019. Naming our conference TutorCon is apt, since the vast majority of our

new RMWCA members are Peer Writing Tutors. It is appropriate, as well, that our gathering took place during International Writing Centers Week: a time when we celebrate the vital role that writing centers play in education.

Neal Lerner writes the following in the epilogue of his rich history of writing centers *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* (Southern Indiana University Press, 2009): “The idea of a writing laboratory is an old idea...yet an idea somehow always ahead of its time....Perhaps we need to stop and let it catch up. Or perhaps we need to move a little more quickly and ride its draft. Whatever the strategy, teaching writing as an experiment in what is possible, as a way of offering meaning-making opportunities for students no matter the subject matter, is an endeavor worth the struggle... It is an ongoing experiment in teaching and learning that beckons us all to don those white coats and safety glasses and discover what works” (196-197).

Lerner, of course, is making reference to the history of the work we do in writing centers and

how it was cast as a “laboratory”-or a place where experimentation and exploration can take place. Laboratory is an apt way to describe our work, and perhaps even more apt for the kind of work that can take place at gatherings like TutorCon or during our webinars. Ideally, we will share in the making of knowledge that influences the practice in our home writing centers. We learn new ways of responding; we learn methods of respecting writers, and new ways to help them learn about writing without compromising their identities. The work we do in the RMWCA is like the work our Writing Centers perform: we are exploring new ways of consulting—new ways of writing—new ways of understanding the world—new ways of writing centering—no lab coats or safety glasses required.

Clint Gardner
RMWCA President

To learn about membership benefits and to stay updated on our upcoming events, visit the RMWCA website at rmwca.org.

Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Gather in Denver for TutorCon 2019

Matthew Candelaria, Susan Heath, Laura Kramer, Colton Lee, Harrison Murray, Nina O'Grady, Louie Pinkerton, and JJ Seggelke (Metropolitan State University of Denver)

RMWCA's bi-annual conference, co-hosted this year by CWWTC, took place February 15-16, 2019 in Denver, CO. Interested in hosting TutorCon 2021? Contact the RMWCA board!

TutorCon kicked off with workshops for both tutors and administrators on Friday night. The tutors' workshop focused on "ten-minute takeaways," a platform for targeted teaching around specific writing concerns, such as how to write a literature review. The administrator workshop focused on training tutors in best practices and featured presentations from writing center administrators from across the region. The three-hour workshop was broken into 15-minute sessions covering diverse topics from guided relaxation (facilitated by Julie Voss of Front



Christopher LeCluyse (Westminster College) talks about how consultants reflect on their sessions.

Range Community College) to a unique model of observing sessions (outlined by Regis University Writing Center Manager Ameeta Scott). These focused sessions offered tangible, condensed takeaways.

Saturday morning's festivities began with a continental breakfast and welcome speeches from Colorado-Wyoming Writing Tutors Conference president and conference chair Justin Bain and RMWCA president Clint Gardner. The CWWTC treasurer, Jason Schlueter, and RMWCA treasurer, Elizabeth Kleinfeld, also presented travel grants to this year's winners.

Following the welcomes and awards, Tobi Jacobi, Director of the Center for Community Literacy, Research and Outreach in the Department of English at Colorado State University gave a rousing keynote talk entitled, "Collaborations, Complicities, and the Radical Work of Community Writing." Jacobi argued that writing and literacy work are vital to the development of intentional university/community engagements.

After the keynote, conference attendees had a full day of presentations, workshops, roundtables, and discussions. There were so many inspiring and innovative sessions, we can't possibly describe them all. Instead, we've decided to share some tutor voices:



Cass Eddington (University of Denver) talks about how we interact with texts.

Congratulations to our Travel Grant Recipients!

Lauren Adams, Nathan Moon, and Madeline Sholar (*Montana State University*)
Joseph Allred (*Utah State University*)
Adam Brantley and Kenneth Butterfield (*Brigham Young University*)
Abigail Dunn (*University of Idaho*)
Kendra Madsen (*University of Utah*)

The Voices of Tutor Con

Peer consultants from Metropolitan State University of Denver talk about their conference experience:

“It was an eye-opening experience! As a first-time attendee, I was lucky enough to attend Nick Trotter’s ‘Diversity and Collaboration: An Improv Approach as a way to strengthen our teamwork in the Writing Center.’” - **Nina O’Grady**

“I appreciated how worker-centered the TutorCon was. It was not a conference that sought increasing tutoring competency in order to improve productivity in writing centers in a way that treats the writing center as a business; rather, TutorCon focused on worker wellness in order to increase tutoring competency in a radical space.”- **Matthew Candelaria**



Isabelle Aragon-Menzel and Tanner Haughn from Colorado College talk about using a writing studio model to connect with students athletes on a block plan.

“I was blown away by the amount of knowledge and creativity at this conference. I enjoyed Abigail Dunn’s ‘Putting Tutoring Sessions into Written Advice: How the University of Idaho Writing Center Assisted Incarcerated Students Unable to Access Our In-Person or Online Services.’ The idea of being able to help students that don’t have the same access to centers is incredible. I believe that everyone is a writer, and Abigail Dunn is an advocate for those writers no matter where they may be in their personal journey.” - **Laura Kramer**

“As a presenter, this was an excellent opportunity to have a much larger outreach. This aspect was great and those who were in attendance all came with an open mindset and very engaging questions. I’d like to see more undergraduate peer tutors at the conference in the future!” - **Harrison Murray**

Upcoming Events

→ Summer Book Club ←

Join us this summer for online discussions of Laura Greenfield’s 2019 book *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement!*

Dates and times are available online at RMWCA.org

→ Brown Bag with the Board ←

Meet your board for an open online discussion this fall!

Wednesday, September 8, 2019

12:00-1:00 p.m.

→ IWCA-NCPTW Combined Conference ←

We hope to see you in Columbus, OH this fall! For information and registration info, visit writingcenters.org.

October 16-19, 2019

Thank you to Lori Salem, John Nordlof, and Harry Denny!

These three co-authors joined us on April 18th for an online discussion of their recent *Writing Center Journal* article, “Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that was so bad: Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working-Class Students in Writing Centers.” And thank you to all the RMWCA members and guests who participated in this webinar, our first of 2019!

In Memorium: Michelle Solomon Szetela

Clint Gardner, RMWCA President

I first met Michelle Szetela many years ago when Harry Denny, who was then the writing center director at the University of Stony Brook, introduced her to me at CCCC: “Hi Clint, I want to introduce you to someone special.” I was sitting at the International Writing Centers Association table, if I recall correctly, meeting and greeting people and letting them in on the benefits of joining IWCA. “This is Michelle Solomon. Michelle, Clint Gardner, President of IWCA.” Michelle was an undergraduate at Stony Brook at the time. Have you ever had the experience of meeting someone for the first time, and somehow knowing that the person was going to mean a lot to you in future? That’s what it was like in meeting Michelle.

“It is great to meet you!” Michelle offered her hand. I took it and she shook it vigorously. In our brief conversation, her enthusiasm and wry sense of humor came through loud and clear. I wish I could say that I spent a long time talking with Michelle and Harry, but I’m pretty sure we just exchanged courtesies and moved along with our conference. Still, I remember meeting Michelle clearly, which is a lot to say considering the hundreds of people I’ve spoken to at tables like that over the years.

That introduction, however, was just the first of my many interactions with Michelle. At first they were mostly online, but then, coincidentally, Michelle relocated to Utah with her husband for work purposes, and Michelle started working at Salt Lake Community College teaching part-time in the English Department. Given her writing center experience, as well, I hired her to work in our Student Writing Center. I usually only hire peer tutors, but Michelle talked me into it, and I was more than willing, given her substantial experience.

Michelle taught part-time and worked a few hours in the Student Writing Center for a couple of years before she got a job at a local high school. After getting the high school job, however, she kept teaching for SLCC both in our Online Plus 2010 program—a distinctive hybrid class that is highly individualized and interactive for students—as well as in our concurrent enrollment



Michelle and her beloved husband Ed

program, where local high school students take our introduction to writing class at their school. The President of SLCC asked colleagues in the English department for their memories of Michelle. One stated that she was “wry and wickedly smart, and at the same time always acutely sensitive to our emotions.”

It was only this school year that we started talking about the possibilities of having a writing center at her high school, but she had been planning on it for some time. During those conversations, I talked her into becoming Utah State Representative on the RMWCA board. All was going in typical Michelle fashion: enthusiastically and thoroughly. You can read about that new writing center in Michelle’s own words in this newsletter.

But then I got a text message on a Sunday afternoon from a colleague at the College. I was just two days into spring break, and since I was out-of-town, I had vowed to not read work email the entire time.

“Clint, I’m not sure if you have heard the sad news that Michelle Szetela died last night at 2:00 a.m.”

What? How is that even possible. I was numb. “I thought you might want to know.” Of course I broke my fast and checked my email and social media, and I saw the sad news. Michelle had succumbed to an extremely rare form of cancer that didn’t present symptoms until it was far too late.

I asked Harry Denny for his memories and his thoughts on Michelle’s passing. “We should all be so lucky to have peer tutors so affected by their experiences that they go on into professional life

and seek to reproduce them wherever they go,” he wrote. “Michelle was a testament to all the good that comes from peer tutors who integrate collaboration, mentoring, pedagogy, and research into their everyday practices. And it helps that she was a cheery and amazing person in every facet of her life. We’re a little less whole without Michelle with us.”

The world is definitely a lesser place without Michelle Szetela.

Before her unexpected and untimely death on March 17, 2019, Michelle wrote a “Spotlight” article for our newsletter. Michelle’s article is included below.

Spotlight: Growing New Writing Centers

Michelle Solomon Szetela

More than a decade ago, I attended a conference in Las Vegas, where a tutoring center director friend was also in attendance. I was a newly minted state-certified teacher with an interest in developing secondary writing centers, and our conversation turned to the concept of a Johnny Appleseed-situation: how to start more than one high school writing center.

I’ve since moved to Utah and started teaching at Copper Hills High School, a large high school of nearly 2,800 students located in a suburb of Salt Lake City. After three years of trying to start a writing center, I and four colleagues – Andrea Hinojosa, a Social Studies teacher; Amanda Campos, an art teacher; and fellow English teachers Steve Haslam and Josh Brothers – were awarded a Jordan Education Foundation grant to start a writing center. We developed a tutor training program; determined what data we would need to collect and with whom we would share that information; ascertained how we could track data for free (thank you, Google!); and developed marketing materials and created social media accounts. After months of preparation, we opened the week of February 4, 2019, and almost immediately began reflecting on how to improve our writing center.

It was during our planning period that I remembered my Johnny Appleseed conversation, since in the



Michelle’s Copper Hills High School Writing Center Tutors: Madison Peto, Grace Bramlage, Adi Marshall, and Valery Juarez Reyes (left-right).

midst of all this work, I was offered a position at a new high school in the school district, at Mountain Ridge High School in Herriman, Utah, where I’m hoping to start another writing center.

Editor’s Note: Copper Hills High School has announced that their writing center will be renamed the Michelle Szetela Writing Center in her honor.

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RMWCA membership provides many benefits, including

- Access to robust travel and research grants
- Seed money and grants for sub-regional conferences and gatherings
- An annual webinar series led by experts in our region
- Discounted registration from the RMWCA conference.

Memberships dues are

- \$100 for higher education writing centers*
- \$50 for high school writing centers*
- \$30 for individuals.

Questions?

Contact Elizabeth Kleinfeld, RMWCA Treasurer at ekleinfe@msudenver.edu

**everyone associated with a registered writing center will also be considered a member of The RMWCA.*

RMWCA is a regional chapter of the International Writing Centers Association covering Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.