

The Storying of Colombian Writing Centers

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### Abstract

Using the results from a study conducted on Colombian writing centers, this thesis applies principles from narrative theory to posit a grand narrative for Colombian writing center professionals. The study was modeled on one Jackie Grutsch McKinney used to examine US writing center professionals' descriptions of their work, and the thesis includes a comparison with her results. Respondents were asked to answer seven questions, two of which were multiple choice and five of which were short answer. The questions asked respondents to describe their tutoring staff composition, their center's operations, writing centers in general, and ways their center resembles and differs from other Colombian centers. The study, which involved both quantitative and qualitative analysis, found that Colombian writing centers prioritize reading and orality, in addition to writing, and utilize faculty tutors in a way that US centers generally do not. The responses also displayed a strong community focus in comparison with US writing centers. Based on the data and conclusions from the study, this thesis also suggests some ways US writing centers can learn from Colombian centers to make their work even more effective.

*Key Words:* writing center, Colombia, narrative theory, reading, writing, orality

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

For a little over a decade, Colombian institutions of higher education have begun experimenting with writing centers as part of their effort to improve students' reading, writing, and oral skills. Since Colombian writing centers were originally modeled after US centers, the two began with very similar goals and functions. However, while US centers have remained fairly static during that interval, Colombian centers have begun to operate slightly differently than most US centers do. Unlike writing centers in the US, Colombian writing centers commonly offer services for reading and speaking as well as writing (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 150-65; Carillo 118). Though seemingly small, since all three categories represent efforts at communication through words, this difference in practice likely indicates a difference in theory as well, which could have extensive repercussions not only for defining and running writing centers in Colombia but also for academic perceptions of these three different communication styles.

This difference matters because addressing or choosing not to address a method of communication reveals a discrepancy in the value placed on that aspect or method, a differing view of the connection between those included and excluded, or both. More importantly, this variation reveals a difference in professionals' views of what a writing center is and does, which should be paralleled by a difference in the way directors of those centers describe their role, purpose, and activities. According to narrative theory, these views and descriptions combine to reveal a grand narrative, which James A. Berlin defines as "the stories we tell about our experiences that attempt to account for all features of it (its totality) in a comprehensive way" (Berlin 19; Penner 195; Eubanks 36; Bruner "Self-Making" 36). As a result of these premises and using survey data on how Colombian writing center professionals describe their work, this



study aimed to identify the grand narrative Colombian writing center professionals were telling themselves and one another; then, after comparing this grand narrative with the one Jackie Grutsch McKinney identified in her study on US writing centers, this thesis sought to discover how US writing centers could learn from Colombian ones to better serve their students.

### **Research Approach**

This study followed the framework from a study of US writing centers conducted by Jackie Grutsch McKinney. In 2011, McKinney performed a study on US writing center professionals, asking them to describe their jobs, the purpose of their work, and how they saw their centers as similar to and different from others (92). Using constructivist ideas from narrative theory, McKinney based her study on the idea that the way individuals in an in-group describe their work—what they say they do, how they advertise what they do, and the differences between those two statements—reveals some of that group’s overarching values (11, 15-17). In her book, McKinney not only included the survey’s results and her interpretation of the data but also went on to examine the silences in those descriptions, highlighting some aspects of writing center work that respondents ignored, illustrating areas of inconsistency or insufficiency in those functions and ideals that respondents frequently claimed. McKinney asserted that the most repeated ideas, especially those sharing common words or phrases, signified an imperfect perception of identity that had gone largely unquestioned in the larger writing center community. She summed up this perception of identity in a statement of the grand narrative accepted and perpetuated by US writing center professionals. Then, she proceeded to interrogate that grand narrative statement and to show how it contains gaps and oversimplifications, obscuring parts of writing center work while highlighting others.

Based on the narrative theory framework and findings from McKinney's study, this thesis analyzed the results of a study I conducted on Colombian writing center professionals' descriptions of their work. The study borrowed McKinney's four open-ended questions, which appear as questions 4-7 in Appendices A and B of this thesis. In McKinney's study, these questions asked:

1. In your own words, what is a writing center?
2. How do you describe the role of your writing center to those at your own school?
3. In what ways do you think your writing center is different from other writing centers?
4. In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other writing centers? (63)

In addition to these four questions and in place of the multiple-choice questions McKinney included in her study, I added questions that asked respondents who tutored in their writing centers and what kinds of functions their centers relied on to carry out their mission. The survey materials were translated into Spanish by a native Spanish speaker who is Colombian, completed much of her education in Colombia, and worked in a Spanish Writing Center. She also reviewed my translations of participants' responses from Spanish into English to help ensure an accurate and ethical presentation of respondents' ideas.

Using the data gleaned from participants' responses, the present study attempted to answer several questions related to the connection between writing center professionals' descriptions of their work and the underlying, often implicit, beliefs and values those descriptions reveal. If such a connection exists, what grand narrative do Colombian writing center professionals imply their adherence to through the ways they describe their work? How does that narrative compare to the one McKinney identified in US writing center professionals'

descriptions of their work? How can US writing centers learn from these differences? These are the central research questions that informed and shaped the study at the center of this thesis.

It was reasonable to directly compare US and Colombian writing center grand narratives because Colombian theorists began by closely examining and experimenting with US centers' approaches; only afterward did they begin modifying that approach to serve their populations more effectively (Carlino 490-91; Narváez Cardona 147, 154; Tanzi 49). The foundational similarities and visible differences between US and Colombian writing centers made a direct comparison between the two studies fruitful, especially because the qualitative questions and narrative theory analysis in the present study were modeled directly on the central questions and analysis techniques McKinney used in her study. While it is true that every context has different needs and requirements, a more thorough understanding of the approaches Colombian professionals were taking in their writing centers could benefit US centers by offering solutions to similar needs in their local populations. Engaging with these ideas should enable US writing center staff to gain a fresh perspective, which has intrinsic value even apart from any practical benefits. The study may also reflect a cultural difference between Colombian and US cultures. If, as Diaz-Guerrero and Szalay assert, Colombian students tend to see their teachers as more personal, with "little indication of social distance" compared to US students, this study may point to an impact cultural values can have upon academic values (133). However, further research would be necessary to confirm such an argument, which is outside the scope of this study.

### **Study Significance**

The impetus for this thesis was the absence of a study of Colombian writing center professionals comparable to McKinney's for US writing centers. The differing activities that each country's writing centers engaged in seemed to reflect a diverging understanding of what a

writing center is, does, or should be, which had significant implications for how writing center professionals story themselves and their work and, consequently, how they serve writers. This study contributes to the field by adding to the literature on Colombian writing center tutors and operations. More importantly, it posits a grand narrative for Colombian writing center professionals and compares that grand narrative with the one McKinney identified for US centers. Using this comparison and the practical details included in respondents' answers to the survey, this thesis suggests some ways US writing centers could learn from Colombian centers to become even more effective.

### **US Writing Center Background**

In the United States, writing centers have been in development for over a century. They developed out of the writing laboratory, which began as a method of classroom instruction that was more student-driven than traditional models had been. Instead of emphasizing the importance of memorization or group instruction, the classroom laboratory model worked on the premise that students should be “learning to do a thing by doing it” (Thach, qtd. in Lerner 24). As Neal Lerner observes, “In an 1894 series in *The Dial* on composition teaching practices nationwide, several prominent educators described their classrooms as writing laboratories,” indicating that the method was being used as a respectable tool for education research (Lerner 25).

Though not the dominant method of instruction, the laboratory method persisted as an experiment in individualized education. In 1922, for example, Helen Parkhurst's book, *Education on the Dalton Plan*, described a classroom in which students worked independently at tables with resources while instructors moved among them, available to help when needed (39, 43). On the Dalton Plan, students received highly individualized instruction as

they worked at their own pace, which, combined with the learning by doing aspects of the instruction, likely contributed to Murphy, Law, and Sherwood calling Parkhurst's book "the central text and philosophy from which much writing center theory and practice derive" (qtd in Lerner 18). Though Parkhurst's *Education on the Dalton Plan* focuses on education broadly rather than on writing instruction particularly, it utilizes theory and motivations similar to the writing laboratory, as it emphasizes the role and primacy of the student over that of the teacher and allows students to learn by doing rather than through lectures or recitation (Lerner 20). The Dalton Plan, though effective, required more time and effort from instructors than was tenable for large-scale public education, illustrating the reasons the laboratory method did not come to dominate classroom instruction either in composition courses or across the disciplines (Lerner 19).

Around the 1930s, increasing enrollment pressures and the perennial frustrations with student writing that characterize higher education led to the implementation of the writing laboratory as a space outside the classroom where students could go for additional help (Carino "Early Writing Centers" 13). In more sweeping terms, between the 1920s and 40s in the US, this division of the writing lab and the composition classroom facilitated the development and perception of the writing lab primarily as a place rather than as a method (Boquet 45). Precursors to writing centers included both writing clinics and writing labs, each of which had a slightly different instructional approach. In writing clinics, tutors worked one-on-one to address students' difficulties with writing, whereas writing labs could accommodate groups of students who all needed help with similar topics, much like a study hall (Moore 6-7). However, in the 1930s, most writing clinics and laboratories primarily served a remedial function, existing more as a last resort for the most struggling students than as assets

for nurturing writers at all skill levels (Moore 3; Lerner 28). Though some classroom writing laboratories still operated like the individualized, student-driven model that characterized previous experiments, most classrooms did not, and fledgling writing clinics and laboratories, struggling to keep up with the demand for their services, often used worksheets and pamphlets to drill details of grammar, spelling, and other markers of non-standard English without the context of a student's paper (Lerner 30).

Beginning in the 1940s, however, the writing lab shifted to a more question-based method that emphasized student confidentiality and the relationship between tutor and student as the basis for learning. This change followed cognitivist principles from the field of psychology for regulating behavior rather than the behaviorist principles that relied on fear and punishment (Boquet 47-48). The resulting shift in attitude contributed to writing lab professionals viewing their work both as creating an "informal, friendly place" (Harris "SLATE Statement") where students could "feel secure in their expression of thoughts and ideas, as they should in a therapist's office" (Boquet 48), and as a subversive element within higher education that sought to prioritize students' perspectives above those of administration. Though the higher education community at large tended (as it often still does) to continue viewing writing labs as remedial forces for underprepared students, this shift in pedagogical theory prompted a shift in writing lab professionals' goals and self-concept. Writing centers went from identifying as last-resort remediation where struggling students could clean up their writing to fostering a collaborative, welcoming environment where all students could become better writers. One result of this change was a divide between what writing center professionals thought they did and what their institutions thought they did (Boquet 47-48), a divide that drove

Stephen North to publish his “The Idea of a Writing Center” in 1984 and that still persists today (North 63-64).

During the mid- to late 1950s, writing labs and clinics in the United States began to fall out of favor and disappear from the literature. The causes for this decline during the 1950s and 60s may have included lack of documentation, an increased emphasis on math and science during the Cold War, the rising prominence of linguistics, or the “mass segregation of working class students onto two-year campuses” (Boquet 50), which reduced the perceived need for entrance exams and remediation. Whatever the causes, writing labs and clinics increasingly disappeared from the literature. However, when open admissions initiatives in the 1970s resulted in a massive influx of students on university and college campuses, writing centers emerged to meet the needs of students whose professors found their writing unacceptable (Boquet 49-50). Like the laboratory classrooms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these writing centers experimented and argued in the literature of the 1970s and 80s over methods and goals for writing centers, discussions that resulted in the collaborative, process-oriented (Summerfield 25) type of writing centers most common in the US today (Boquet 51). This period also included the advent of peer tutoring, which was both more cost-effective and more palatable to struggling students, clearly separating the writing center from the classroom and using a more relaxed and reciprocal social context to help students and tutors alike improve as writers through their conversations (Bruffee 207; Boquet 51).

All of these factors resulted in US writing center professionals adopting and perpetuating a self-concept that McKinney calls “the writing center grand narrative,” a story that (she says, based on her 2011 survey of 117 writing center professionals) “goes something like this: *writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on*

*their writing*” (3). One of McKinney’s many evidences that she cites for the accuracy of this summary of writing center self-concept is Muriel Harris’s 1988 “SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English) Statement: The Concept of a Writing Center,” which is the first resource listed under “Starting a Writing Center” on the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) website. In her “SLATE Statement,” Harris asserts (and the IWCA implicitly affirms by placing the piece so prominently on its website) that all writing centers agree on how to tutor. Specifically, she lists their shared characteristics as follows:

1. Tutorials are offered in a one-to-one setting.
2. Tutors are coaches and collaborators, not teachers.
3. Each student’s individual needs are the focus of the tutorial.
4. Experimentation and practice are encouraged.
5. Writers work on writing from a variety of courses.
6. Writing centers are available for students at all levels of writing proficiency.

(Harris “SLATE Statement”)

The age, perpetuation, and prominence of Harris’s summary of writing center tutoring indicates that, despite three intervening decades, the basic tutoring work and goals of writing centers in the US have not changed much since 1988.

### **Colombian Writing Center Background**

In Colombia, writing centers began developing only a little over a decade ago as educators, recognizing student difficulties with producing the quality of writing they require and finding institutional support for writing education to be lacking, took to the internet to see how their counterparts in other countries were addressing similar issues (Carlino 490-91; Narváez Cardona 147, 154). At that time, students, rather than their institutions or educators,



were viewed as solely responsible for their reading and writing difficulties, which were considered severe enough to constitute a “crisis” (Zavala and Córdova 137; Soares Soto et al. 424). The educators’ research led them to experiment with both writing centers and WAC/WID (Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines) initiatives, which offered students more support and assistance in their writing than they received in the traditional, single-subject classroom and thus marked a shift in the literature from frustration with students for their writing skills to a more supportive focus on providing services to teach and assist those students (Carlino 488). As part of this experimentation, following the format and strategies employed by the US English-language writing centers on which it was modeled, the first writing center in Colombia was established at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali in 2008 (Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 149).

A few other universities also established writing centers, resulting in a gradual growth of writing centers in Colombia. In 2012, Paula Carlino observed that “the idea of a writing center with writing tutors is usually not known in Latin American and Spanish universities,” though she noted a “handful” of recent initiatives in countries such as Colombia (492). Since then, writing centers have begun to gain more traction in the country, as Calle Álvarez’s 2018 study examining 18 Colombian college- or university-level writing centers indicates (“Perspectiva” 150). Government initiatives for the improvement of reading and writing also played a role in catalyzing the establishment and spread of writing centers. The recent increase in number of Colombian writing centers was in part due to a 2015 government initiative to improve students’ reading and writing, the Plan Nacional de Lectura y Escritura (PNLE) (Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 148; Bedoya Mazo 295). The Impuesto sobre la Renta para la Equidad (CREE), created in 2012, was another such initiative that resulted in the creation of writing centers

(Soares Sito et al. 421n2). These government initiatives helped motivate institutions to develop their own strategies for bolstering students' skills, which resulted in enough institutional support that writing centers were established in almost two dozen universities. This growth was so significant that, in 2019, Soares Sito et al. observed that writing centers modeled on the North American tradition were one of the most widespread strategies for addressing university students' reading and writing processes (429).

Since the first Colombian writing centers were created based on the writing centers developed in the US, their resemblance comes as no surprise. Colombian writing centers, too, offer tutoring in a one-to-one setting; a 2018 study that summarized the operations of 19 Colombian writing centers found that the centers agreed on the importance of tutoring and that their purpose was to support writers in their production of texts (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 167). These characteristics resemble the first and third elements of Harris's SLATE statement that directs the creation of US centers, since these Colombian centers manifested a commitment to offering tutorials in a one-to-one setting and to focusing on the student's individual needs in the tutorial. Colombian writing centers also value collaboration in their tutorials, and they encourage experimentation and practice (Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84; Calle Arango et al. 890-91). These qualities relate to the second and fourth elements in Harris's SLATE statement. These elements are not the only characteristics shared between US and Colombian centers, but they are some of those most central to US writing center theory and practice, making them arguably the most significant.

Despite these similarities, Colombian writing centers have also manifested some differences from US centers in their practice. The government initiatives that contributed to the increased use of writing centers in Colombia emphasized reading as well as writing, so

Colombian writing centers commonly work with both reading and writing skills (Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 150-65), while US centers—and US writing center scholarship—tend to pass over reading except to advise that students read their work aloud (Carillo 118). This passing mention of reading, though, is different from the attention that reading practices are receiving in some Colombian writing centers. Rather than treating reading as a practical detail, necessary but at best tangential to the real work of a writing conference, Colombian writing center scholarship frequently discusses reading and writing together as mutually dependent processes, both of which are vital to written communication (Soares Soto et al. 424; Moreno Mosquero and Baracaldo Lozano 11; Salazar-Sierra et al. 56). Colombian writing center scholarship also frequently discusses orality along with reading and writing as part of the work of a writing center (Salazar-Sierra 56; Torres Perdigón 326; Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 159; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84). While these mentions are not as frequent as those for the other two processes, they appear often enough to be significant and to differentiate Colombian centers from US centers, whose literature rarely discusses orality beyond advising tutors in effective ways of interacting with students during writing conferences (Mackiewicz and Thompson “Spoken Written-Language” 47; Lochman 28).

Based in part on distinguishing characteristics like the study of reading and orality alongside and separate from writing, Soares Soto et al. assert that Colombian writing centers have entered a second generation (424). While the first generation of writing centers that Soares Soto et al. posit focused on remedial skill-building, the second generation sets itself apart by expanding its concerns to include responding to the contexts, realities, and stories that converge in a university setting (424). This is a much larger, more general, and more abstract goal than simply working on grammar and other relatively straightforward subjects. In expanding the focus

of writing center praxis and scholarship in this way, though, Colombian writing centers are beginning to differentiate and define themselves separately from the US writing center theory and models that they used as a foundation, leading to the kinds of developments in theory and practice that are explored in Chapter 2.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the development of US and Colombian writing centers as context for a study I conducted on Colombian writing centers. This study forms the backbone of this thesis, since it provided the data necessary to answer the questions that prompted this thesis. The central research questions of this thesis were these:

1. What grand narrative do Colombian writing center professionals imply their adherence to through the ways they describe their work?
2. How does that narrative compare to the one McKinney identified in US writing center professionals' descriptions of their work?
3. How can US writing centers learn from these differences?

The following chapters seek to answer these questions by using principles from narrative theory to analyze responses to the survey, which I conducted in February and March 2020. Questions 4-7 in the survey, which constituted the bulk of the data on which the conclusions were based, came directly from questions McKinney used in her survey so that comparison of the two data sets would have fewer pitfalls, and the analysis I used was based on her approach as well.

Chapter 2 explains important features of contemporary US and Colombian writing center theory based on the literature. This literature review provides context for the survey composition and findings of this study. An overview of relevant narrative theory background also appears in Chapter 2 to offer context for my analytical approach in this thesis.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed explanation of how I developed, disseminated, and operated the survey. It includes the theoretical framework I used in developing the study, the research context of the study, and the process I used to select participants. The data collection portion of the chapter covers the details of the survey's workings, from contacting participants and gaining their consent to the survey's questions and platform. I also discuss ethical considerations such as consent, anonymity, and the process of compensation to show how I protected my participants. Chapter 3 also contains an explanation of the translation philosophy I used to translate my respondents' data from Spanish to English, as it appears in Appendix B and in chapters 4-5 of this thesis. After discussing the details of data collection, I explain my methods of analysis in more detail than in chapter 2.

Chapter 4 sets forth the findings of the survey, question by question, explaining the data without the interpretation that would allow me to reach conclusions. This chapter also offers an analysis of each question's responses, noting patterns in preparation for the study's conclusions.

These conclusions appear in Chapter 5, which connects the analysis in Chapter 4 to the central questions of the thesis and so makes a case for how writing centers in Colombia story themselves and their work. The chapter also includes an acknowledgement of the study's limitations and recommendations for further research into the theory and praxis of Colombian writing centers.

The appendices contain the raw data from the study so that anyone who would like to check my translations or review the data for patterns that I missed may do so. Appendix A contains the original results of the survey, and an English translation appears in Appendix B to allow readers without a reading knowledge of Spanish to gain a fuller understanding of the responses supporting my conclusions.

## Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Given that writing centers have existed in some form for over a century, an exhaustive exploration of writing center theory and practice would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Also outside the scope of this thesis are online writing centers. Though some online writing centers exist in Colombia and some physical centers have online elements (Calle Álvarez “Alcance” 137, 150), I have not addressed them here because McKinney did not address them in the study on which this one was modeled. Regarding physical centers, however, this chapter addresses some of the relevant features of contemporary US and Colombian writing center work, then introduces features of narrative theory that inform McKinney’s and my analysis.

### **US Writing Center Theory**

To understand contemporary writing center theory, one should first examine the process through which this theory developed, since that history allows one to better understand the foundational ideas and situations underlying the ways writing center praxis has developed. Peter Carino’s work was helpful in establishing the origins and development of writing centers, past and present. His “Early Writing Centers: Toward a History,” published in 1995, made a case for writing center development prior to the 1970s, which had previously been ignored or uncritically assumed to consist of “stereotypical ‘remedial fix-it shops’ where an unenlightened staff administers current-traditional pedagogy to underprepared and poorly regarded students” (Carino 10). To counter these assumptions and uncover the roots of contemporary writing centers, Carino traces writing centers back to the laboratory classrooms discussed in the introduction, placing the first classroom using the laboratory method in 1904 (“Early Writing Centers” 12). Lerner’s 2009 work filled in gaps still left by Carino’s research, and both writings, in bringing to light the roots of writing centers, allowed writing center theorists to understand their origins and

development in order to more clearly understand how writing centers developed and why they take the form they do today. This work was especially helpful to my thesis work because it allowed me to compare writing center development in the United States and in Colombia, and differences in context and development almost always result in products that, sooner or later, manifest differences in goals, form, or function.

These differences, then, reflect writing center practitioners' views of and beliefs about writing center work. In the book that formed the basis for this thesis, Jackie Grutsch McKinney highlights current writing center goals and values based on the most common elements in writing center professionals' descriptions of their work. The book uses Jerome Bruner's ideas on narrative theory and the results from McKinney's study to deduce a dominant narrative that United States writing centers claim and believe in. Since much of the present study's critical theory was modeled on McKinney's work, the theoretical foundations she identified were of particular importance to this study. Specifically, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, she defines the writing center "grand narrative" in the following terms: "*writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*" (3). This statement offered a helpful starting point for identifying key ideas in a common US writing center theoretical framework, and a few additional topics helped to fill out this "grand narrative" to more fully reflect US writing center scholarship.

#### *Writing Centers Are Not Remedial*

When writing centers started becoming more common in the US around the 1970s, many writing center professionals faced a frustrating divide between their perception of their work and the purpose attributed to them by administration, coworkers, and students alike (Boquet 49-50; North 67). While these latter groups tended to assume that writing center work was remedial, a

way to improve struggling students' grammar skills without sacrificing class time to do so, writing center professionals saw their role as much broader and more significant. Stephen North's 1984 essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," represented a landmark text in the field of writing center work because, although he was not the first person to express the idea that writing centers are more than remedial "fix-it shops" (66), he compellingly communicated the divide between the collaborative, individualized tutoring that writing centers saw as their role and the "skill and drill" approach that most people outside writing center work saw as the purpose of writing centers (67). Following North, many other writing center theorists and practitioners similarly argued that writing centers exist not only for struggling students attempting to edit their papers but for students of all levels, at every stage of the writing process (Carino "Early Writing Centers" 19; Rodis 177, 182; Harris "SLATE Statement"; McKinney 58; Lawrence and Zawacki 214).

### *Writing Centers Aim to Transform Writers*

Instead of serving a remedial, product-oriented goal, writing center scholarship indicates a preoccupation with writers themselves rather than simply with their texts. Again, as North argued against a rampant misperception of writing centers as product-oriented, grammar-obsessed punishments for struggling students, he also asserted that "in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction" (69). This emphasis, too, has continued to characterize writing center theory and praxis, permeating academic articles that have shaped writing center praxis, beginning with such articles as Jeff Brooks's "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work" and Marilyn M. Cooper's "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers," both of which emphasize, in Brooks's words, that the "primary object in the writing



center session is not the paper, but the student” and include practical instruction on how to achieve this student-centered instructional goal (Brooks 224; Cooper 338). This focus on students instead of on textual products is also borne out in ongoing writing center practice, manifesting even in linguistic and discourse analyses of tutor-student interactions, where tutors’ word choice emphasizes second-person pronouns and students display more first-person pronoun use (Mackiewicz and Thompson “Adding” 217). North’s injunction to focus on transforming writers rather than their texts continues to shape writing center theory and praxis, much as it has since the expansion of writing center popularity in the 1970s.

This emphasis on approaching writers as authors rather than as the producers of defective papers or collections of substandard sentences, along with the assertion that writing centers exist “to talk to writers” (North 78), carries forward the values for student autonomy and holistic development that characterized the writing laboratory into writing center theory and praxis. A sizeable portion of the philosophy underlying writing center theory relies on the belief that “independence and initiative (or power)” is “necessary for intellectual growth” and that writing centers contribute to the development of these qualities by inviting students to participate as “active agents” rather than “passive objects of transmission” in the writing process (Healy 18). This commitment to student-driven work has led writing centers to focus on student-selected work, to push students to do their own thinking and composition, and to tout this value for individuality as evidence that writing centers help resist traditional power structures within the hierarchy of academic institutions (Neff 376; Shamoon and Burns 225; Brooks 224; Healy 17). This third application of these theoretical foundations has led many writing center professionals to view their work in some sense as counter-hegemonic or “iconoclastic,” to use McKinney’s term (36). Because writing centers are situated outside the traditional structure of a university,

they also feel themselves to be outside its power structure, at least with respect to identity. As McKinney observes, much of writing center scholarship reflects this perception by emphasizing a sense of difference and lack of belonging (McKinney 36; Riley 149; Davis 6).

*Writing Centers Operate Via Collaboration*

To achieve this goal of improving students' writing rather than merely their texts, writing center theory advocates a collaborative approach to tutoring in which the student retains ultimate control of his or her paper. North addresses collaboration as an important component of writing center work (70), but that collaborative approach constitutes the central focus in much of Andrea Lunsford's work. In her 1991 essay "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," she discusses her work in studying collaboration before the rest of writing center scholarship exploded with praise of the practice and asserts the importance of working together as equals toward common goals using various strengths (Lunsford 92). Lunsford's arguments reflect the foundational ideas about collaboration that permeate writing center scholarship on the topic. Even in cases where an author cautions against certain types of collaboration, as Judith K. Powers does in her discussion of strategies for conferences with ESL students, the whole enterprise is not discarded. Rather, it is clarified and narrowed to more specifically address particular groups or situations, which underscores its value and effectiveness as a tool in writing center tutoring (Powers 374). The primary goals of collaboration in the writing center include both the immediate objects of pooling resources for more effective work and the broader goal of leveling traditional power dynamics to allow writers greater autonomy and confidence in their work. In collaborative tutoring, both writer and tutor learn from one another as they generate knowledge together during a tutoring session, which allows the writer to more effectively internalize changes to his or her writing process because he or she remains an active agent in

both the conversation about the paper and in changes made to the paper (Harris “Collaboration” 272).

Closely tied to this value for collaboration is writing centers’ widespread use of peer tutoring. Lunsford emphasizes the practical and theoretical importance of approaching students as their peers rather than as their superiors, asserting that understanding where control is located in collaboration is essential to make that collaboration succeed since a measure of equality is necessary for effective collaboration (97). While graduate students, faculty members, or other specialized staff might seem more qualified than undergraduate students to work in a university writing center, peer tutors’ training allows them to preserve more balanced power dynamics in writing conferences while maintaining theoretical and practical excellence (Harris “Collaboration” 279; Trimbur 289; Weissbach and Pflueger 206).

#### *Writing Centers Offer a Safe, Comfortable Environment*

The main point writing center literature makes about the center as a physical space is that it should be relaxed, designed to put students at ease. Such details as coffee pots are nearly ubiquitous, and couches, colorful posters, and plants are also frequently listed in descriptions of how a writing center should look (Kinhead and Harris 236; Mohr 148; Simon 118; McKinney 21). The goal of decorating with such objects is to “signal (we hope) that this mess is also a friendly, nonthreatening, nonclassroom environment where conversation and questions can fly from one table to another” (Harris “Multiservice Writing Lab” 5-6). Since writing center work revolves around writers’ active participation in the conference, mitigating the anxiety surrounding critique and communicating a sense of agency to the student are important goals. The literature argues that physically distancing the writing center from a classroom setting

through this kind of relaxed, home-like décor helps create an atmosphere that invites students to participate instead of encouraging them to be passive receivers of tutors' advice.

### **Colombian Writing Center Theory**

These features of US writing center theory form part of the backdrop to Colombian writing center theory as well, since Colombian centers were developed based on US models (Carlino 490-91; Narváez Cardona 147, 154; Tanzi 49). While it can be helpful to keep the features of US writing center theory in mind for the sake of context, writing centers in Colombia are not identical to US centers, and to assume that these ideas apply to the same extent and in the same ways would be a mistake. Gerzon Yair Calle Álvarez's study, "Perspectiva de los Centros de Escritura en Colombia [Perspective of Writing Centers in Colombia]," offers a helpful summary of current Colombian writing center practice. Published in 2018, Calle Álvarez's article examined 19 Colombian writing centers (18 of which worked in higher education) primarily through the information on their webpages and in publications regarding the experience of working in their institutional contexts. His detailing of the functions of these writing centers offers a comprehensive and up-to-date view of Colombian writing centers, which helps both in tracing their development and in understanding the shape of the field at present. Using ideas from Calle Álvarez and other theorists, the following sub-sections cover some of the key distinguishing features of Colombian writing centers, especially those features relevant to the study at the center of this thesis project.

#### *Writing Centers Offer Personalized Tutoring*

This element of Colombian writing center theory is that which most resembles US theory and practice. According to Calle Álvarez's study, Colombian writing centers share a complete consensus on the primary reason for their creation and for their tutoring: every writing center he

looked at was created with the expressed motivation of improving students' academic writing, and they all agreed that the role of tutoring is to support writers in their production of texts ("Perspectiva" 167). All Colombian writing centers, then, appear to prioritize individualized tutoring services, particularly in relation to writing. These tutoring services range from remediation to the development of critical thinking skills (Calle-Arango "Practicas" 161; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 88), and they often function on a collaborative model similar to that used in the US (Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 89; Calle Arango et al. 887; Soares Sito et al. 429). Their shared goal is to help people improve their writing skills, so tutors adjust each tutorial to offer what each writer needs (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 167; Molina-Natera "Discurso Pedagógico" 126).

However, Calle Álvarez's study also indicates that centers disagree on who should carry out that tutoring and how exactly they can best accomplish their goal of improving students' academic writing, with some centers depending solely on peer tutors and others utilizing faculty members as tutors, either instead of or in addition to student tutors (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 167; Molino-Natera "Discurso Pedagógico" 126). This reliance on faculty members as tutors seems odd given that theorists and directors within the Colombian writing center context refer to peer tutoring as the best approach for excellent tutoring dynamics (Calle-Arango "Centros" 80; Molino-Natera "Centros" 24-25). Regardless of who their tutors are, Colombian writing centers maintain a focus on improving students' literacy and facility with written communication in order to help them enter the professional world with strong communication skills that will enable them both to succeed in and to contribute to their respective fields, in line with the goals of the PNLE (Plan Nacional de Lectura y Escritura).

*Writing Centers Focus on Writing, Reading, and Orality*

While many of these centers still call themselves writing centers, most of them focus not only on improving students' writing skills but on reading and orality as well, since all three concepts are interconnected and essential to excellent communication (Salazar-Sierra 56; Torres Perdigón 326; Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 159; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84; Calle-Arango "Prácticas" 157). The concept of orality includes several aspects of individual and cultural speech acts, but most of what writing center literature there is on the topic seems to treat orality as a common academic function, much like reading or writing, and so focuses on the practical applications for speech (Lochman 19). This addition of reading and speech work reflects the context in which Colombian writing centers exist, which focuses on literacy more as a sociocultural phenomenon than a linguistic one (Soares Soto et al. 428). This larger concern with students' contexts fits with the broader, more diversified focus of writing centers in the country.

Moreover, part of the impetus for the establishment of many Colombian writing centers involved government initiatives such as the PNLE, which, as one may deduce through the title alone even without additional information, involves more skills than writing alone (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 148). In addition to this external motivation, the research that committees did before setting up their centers also helped lead to the inclusion of these extra elements, since writing centers in countries outside the US—particularly those in Asia—often include additional elements like these in their tutoring (Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 83; Calle-Arango "Prácticas" 158). Also relevant was the institutions' own recognition of students' needs in these areas (Pineda Repiso 134). All these factors combined to generate interest in reading and orality

initiatives as well as writing instruction in Colombian education, which in turn led to their inclusion in the writing center because of the close relationships between the topics.

While the origins of reading and orality tutoring in Colombian writing centers are well documented, practical descriptions appear to be scarce. My research did not uncover any journal articles containing specifics about how such tutoring works. There were some mentions on writing center websites of their practices, but those descriptions differed from center to center. For example, while the tutor guide for the writing center at Universidad ICESI treated reading and writing tutoring as occurring together in tutoring sessions (“Guía del Tutor”), the Spanish center at Universidad de los Andes required undergraduate students to choose reading, writing, or orality as the subject of their tutoring session before they could make an appointment (“Nuestras Tutorías”). However, the details of how Colombian writing center tutors address these topics are outside the scope of this study, which only addresses general writing center functions.

### *Writing Centers are Intra-Institutional Collaborators*

Since the primary impetus for establishing many Colombian writing centers involved government initiatives such as the PNLE, Colombian writing centers seem to rest on a slightly different institutional footing than US centers do (Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 148). While occasional complaints arise in the literature about remedial misperceptions of writing centers (Calle-Arango “Centros” 82; Pineda Repiso 139), they are significantly rarer than the manifestations of counter-institutional feeling and goals in US writing center literature that led McKinney to include “iconoclastic” as a descriptor in her statement of the US writing center grand narrative (36). Part of the reason for this more friendly treatment of institutions in Colombian writing center literature may have to do with the origins of these centers. Many

Colombian writing centers are included in their institutions' language departments rather than existing more independently or being structured under administrative support (Molina-Natera "Centros de Escritura" 18). Colombian writing centers also display a tendency to freely collaborate within their institutions, whether with faculty, other departments, or the larger academic community (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 149; Moreno Mosquera 11; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84). Overall, the literature seems to reflect a group of writing centers that are comfortable belonging in and working with their institutions in Colombia.

### **Narrative Theory**

The analysis supporting this study's conclusions depended on a narrative theory framework similar to that which McKinney used in *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*. I treated writing center professionals' descriptions of their work as stories consciously or unconsciously designed to highlight certain aspects of their work and to hide others. As the constructivist theorist Jerome Bruner points out, the human impulse to story is near irresistible, as we continually seek to fit our experiences into a totalizing framework that allows us to make sense of our lives ("Life" 691-92). However, the impetus for this thesis was the belief that ethical practice requires continual examination and interrogation of those narratives; that kind of critical interrogation is outside the scope of this thesis, but my aim to articulate the narrative should prove helpful to future examination of these stories.

Though narrative theory is, as one would expect, primarily concerned with more traditional stories, it also has applications to statements of roles and goals, such as appear in analyzing writing center professionals' responses, because they represent the character roles and story arcs people identify themselves with. Broadly, one working definition of narrative given by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz in their introduction to *Narrative Theory* explains



narrative as a “multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience” and clarifies that the message may be communicated before, during, or after the events it discusses and that, in studying it, the narrative’s effects on its audience may be just as important as the story itself (Herman, et al., 3-4). Regarding grand narratives, James A. Berlin defines the term as “the stories we tell about our experiences that attempt to account for all features of it” (19). Though Berlin’s focus was on using postmodern theory to explode the myth of grand narratives’ ability to contain all of any experience, which is outside the scope of this thesis, his definition helpfully describes a behavior that human beings engage in as part of their efforts to understand, justify, and communicate their own experiences both to themselves and to the people around them, and the products of that behavior were the focus of this thesis.

Narrative theory was especially helpful for this study because it examines the stories people tell for the ways those stories both reflect and shape individuals and societies. Since story acts as a vehicle for such powerfully formative elements, much of narrative theory operates on the idea that stories are not “transparent vehicles for discernible realities or unproblematic visions of individually animated minds creating their own meaning” (Penner 195). Moreover, this kind of analysis applies not only to literary texts and other works that overtly pose as stories but also to everyday texts that still communicate cultural content but do so less explicitly than overt stories do (Eubanks 36). While individuals may think they are expressing only their own ideas, their statements also reveal the totalizing frameworks—the grand narratives—they perpetuate and adhere to.

The use of narrative theory and the identification of grand narratives in composition scholarship and in writing center literature are not new ideas. Beth Daniell and Lynn Bloom each articulate a dichotomy in the grand narratives perpetuated in composition scholarship. Daniell

identifies the two narratives as casting teachers either as heroes of knowledge or as heroes of liberty, celebrated for their role in saving their students (394). In keeping with the cautionary note attending most discussions of grand narratives, she warns, “[W]e must all be careful of literacy narratives that make us feel good” (Daniell 401). Bloom identifies the master plots of the miracle cure and the dramatic change (130-31), which differ from Daniell’s grand narratives but similarly cast teachers as saviors, reinforcing the impressive or even heroic nature of the story composition scholars tell about their work. Critiques of grand narratives on similar grounds in writing centers have also appeared, including Nancy Grimm’s “Attending to the Conceptual Change Potential of Writing Center Narratives,” which critiques the moral implications of totalizing narratives in writing center work and scholarship (7), and Phillip Gardner and William Ramsey’s “The Polyvalent Mission of Writing Centers,” which identifies a writing center grand narrative based on resistance (27). In all these works, grand narratives appear as unavoidable but problematic ways of interpreting and responding to the world because they overgeneralize and so necessarily become, to varying degrees, false depictions of the realities they describe.

This view of grand narratives features prominently in a constructivist approach to narrative since this approach “takes as its central premise that ‘world-making’ is the principal function of the mind” (Bruner “Life” 28). Jerome Bruner’s work highlights the intersections between individuals’ construction of stories to make sense of their lives and the larger societal narratives into which individuals try to fit their experiences. In Bruner’s view, people attempt to place new information within the networks of their existing stories, which both reinforces those narratives and limits the ways in which people can see (Bruner “Self-Making” 36). Three of Bruner’s assertions about narrative were particularly influential for the present study: first, individuals shape their stories to indicate that they belong to a culture or community; second,

internalized narratives shape future behavior; and third, narratives are subjective interpretations of reality (Bruner “Self-Making” 29, 36). These ideas formed a substantial portion of the theoretical framework for McKinney’s book, on which I based the present study.

*Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* examined US writing centers’ totalizing narratives; in April 2011, McKinney surveyed 117 writing center professionals, asking them to describe what a writing center is and what it does, and the book’s appendix includes all the data gathered from the study (92). McKinney’s analysis focused on respondents’ answers to the following questions:

1. In your own words, what is a writing center?
2. How do you describe the role of your writing center to those at your own school?
3. In what ways do you think your writing center is different from other writing centers?
4. In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other writing centers?

(McKinney 62)

Using the answers to these questions, McKinney argues, “By and large, the way that writing center scholars, practitioners, and outsiders talk about writing center work fits into a relatively familiar pattern. . . . I call it the writing center grand narrative, which goes something like this: *writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*” (3). McKinney used narrative theory to assert that the stories people tell to and about themselves have power to shape their perceptions and actions. Moreover, according to the theory on which McKinney based her study, every story one chooses to tell leaves out at least some aspect of experience, and the unstated can be even more instructive than the stated components of a narrative.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to this study. It covered key features of US writing center theory that appear in McKinney's conclusions as well as in the conclusions for this study. Broadly, these key features include the ideas that writing centers are not remedial, aim to transform writers, operate via collaboration, and offer a safe, comfortable environment. In addition to the features US and Colombian centers share due to common background, some key features of Colombian writing center theory have also been identified that differentiate them from US centers. While Colombian centers' similarities in offering personalized tutoring resemble US writing center operations, their focus on reading, orality, and intra-institutional collaboration sets them apart from US writing centers. This chapter also included a brief overview of key ideas and theorists from narrative theory that help to inform the theoretical framework on which this study was based. Following the principles of narrative theory and McKinney's study of US writing centers, then, the questions in this study aim to gauge how Colombian writing center professionals view and story their work, the specifics of which I cover in Chapter 3.

### Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of this thesis was to ascertain how Colombian writing centers conceptualized and described themselves and to compare that grand narrative to the one McKinney found to be typical of US writing centers in order to discover ways US writing centers could learn from Colombian centers to better serve their students. To do so, the study underlying this thesis used the framework from McKinney's study to answer the following questions:

1. How do Colombian writing center professionals "story" themselves and their work?
2. How does this narrative differ from the US writing center grand narrative that McKinney identified?
3. What can US writing centers learn from these differences that will help them more effectively serve their students?

#### **Framework**

This study used McKinney's narrative theory framework to analyze the narratives Colombian writing center professionals constructed for themselves and others about what they do. In other words, this study sought to discover how Colombian centers storied themselves—what Colombian writing center professionals stated that they held in common to be their goals and methods—in order to understand what aspects of their jobs they highlighted and claimed as the most important pieces of writing center work as well as how that perspective differed from the one McKinney identified in US writing centers.

This narrative theory framework and McKinney's study itself offered an effective framework for this study because they allowed for a comparison not only of practice but of identity based on descriptions of purpose and practice. And since practice arises out of and expresses identity, studying the latter was essential to a thorough understanding of the former. Of

practice, explanation, and identity, explanation was by far the easiest to procure as a basis for studying phenomena in another country, making language the most natural medium for this study. In addition to this convenience, the intimate connection between language and identity—arguably even closer than that between practice and identity—provided the most expedient data set with the most explanatory power for a thorough understanding of the identity underlying both practice and narrative. Narrative theory, then, provided an effective framework for this study because it uses what people say to demonstrate what they value and how they prefer to see themselves and others, which are essential aspects of identity.

McKinney's study offered a helpful framework because it made direct comparison of Colombian and US writing center narratives feasible by providing information on US writing center narratives. Using the same survey questions minimized the likelihood that the data for my study would contain factors preventing a direct comparison with the results of McKinney's study. It also resolved concerns about whether my central questions would be effective, since McKinney's questions had already proven successful in garnering useful responses for a narrative theory-based analysis.

## **Research Contexts**

The decision to focus on Colombian writing centers stemmed from both scholarly interest and practicality. Latin American writing centers developed much more recently and through a different process than US centers did. This fact made it reasonable to ask whether Latin American writing centers might be developing into something less tied to US writing center praxis than they were at their inception. Additionally, preliminary research revealed some differences in services offered by writing centers in the US and those in Latin American countries. Closer examination revealed that writing centers in Colombia stand out as more

numerous than those in any other Latin American country. This consideration allowed me to narrow my focus to Colombian writing centers as containing the most specific set of participants I could reach while still achieving meaningful results. In keeping with McKinney's methodology, I did not address online writing centers but limited my participant pool to Colombian writing centers that primarily operate in person.

### **Participants Selection**

Specifically, this study surveyed writing center professionals, which included tutors and administrators, but its priority targets were writing center directors. Since support personnel may not have much grounding in writing center theory or tutoring practice, I excluded them when choosing prospective participants in the study. I included some tutors, since their experience and current practice offer them unique insights into how writing centers function in reality rather than primarily in theory. However, I contacted as many writing center directors as possible because they are involved in the most aspects of writing center work and are most likely to be familiar with and conscious of the theoretical underpinnings that determine the focus, goals, and activities of their writing centers. In thus limiting my participant pool to individuals actively and currently engaged in writing center practice, I sought to ensure the most up-to-date and accurate data possible.

This was a study of writing centers located in Colombian institutions of higher learning. Even though some writing centers exist at other levels of education, I focused on those at colleges and universities because writing centers are most common in that context and because I considered writing center practitioners at institutions of higher learning more likely to be conversant with writing center theory and cognizant of the theoretical implications of their work. I selected the writing centers of specific institutions by looking at those listed on the RLCPE (La

Red Latinoamericana de Centros y Programas de Escritura [The Latin American Network of Writing Centers and Programs]) website as well as those Calle Álvarez examined in his 2018 study, “Perspectiva de los Centros de Escritura en Colombia [Perspective of Writing Centers in Colombia].” Of these writing centers, some on the RLCPE website were not recognizable as writing centers, so I eliminated those programs from my participant pool to ensure relevant results. I also eliminated all whose websites appeared to no longer be accessible and those whose websites contained no email contact information. Though McKinney’s process of participant selection was widely different, as she made her survey publicly available through the WCENTER and SSWC listservs as well as through Twitter and Facebook and invited anyone associated with writing center work or research to participate, my study followed a different approach because I did not find an equivalent platform to the professional listservs that McKinney indicated yielded most of her respondents (61). In the absence of this method of survey dissemination, I contacted participants directly through email, which also seemed expedient for encouraging participation in a country with such a smaller population and number of writing centers—and thus of writing center professionals—than the US has.

## **Data Collection**

### *Recruitment*

To contact participants, I obtained email addresses from Colombian writing center websites to ensure that the people I contacted were qualified to participate. After receiving approval for the study and all associated materials from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University, I sent potential participants an email informing them of the purpose of the study. The email also briefly covered confidentiality, compensation, and details of what participants would be expected to do. A link to the survey appeared at the end of the email so that participants could



easily proceed to the survey. After two weeks, I followed up by sending a second email to all participants whose response records I had not yet received. I was able to identify those who had participated by looking at the second data set, separated from the survey responses, that contained respondent names and mailing addresses. This second email contained all the same information as the first email to prevent any confusion for participants. I left the survey open one more week, then closed it, so the survey was open to respondents for a total of three weeks.

### *Survey Platform*

Qualtrics provided a suitable platform for this survey because it allowed me to create all the question types I needed and to separate responses so I could maintain respondents' anonymity. Additionally, the free version of Qualtrics performed all the functions I required, which allowed me to dispense with acquiring funding. This study required no personnel or budget due to its relatively simple online format and the availability of free resources. My translator, a native speaker of Spanish who is Colombian and completed much of her education in Colombia, provided invaluable assistance by translating the survey, recruitment document, and consent form into Spanish for this project. Her work at a Spanish Writing Center meant she came into this project familiar with writing centers, which made her translation assistance even more valuable, and she received compensation for the work she did on this project.

### *Survey Content*

The survey itself consisted of seven questions, the first three of which I composed and the latter four of which came from McKinney's study. The first question in the survey was designed to provide a basic idea of how each respondent's center operated. It asked, "Who tutors students in your writing center? (Please select all that apply)" and offered the following options:

- a. Undergraduate students
- b. Graduate students
- c. Faculty members
- d. Other (please specify).

This question lent itself to quantitative analysis, allowing me to compare the tutor makeup of various centers.

The survey's second question, though similarly geared toward quantitative analysis, was both less specific and more involved than the first. It asked respondents, "Which of the following services does your center offer? (Please select all that apply)" and included the following options:

- a. One-to-one writing tutoring
- b. Group writing instruction
- c. A writing course (or courses)
- d. Pamphlets on writing strategies (grammar, etc.)
- e. Individual reading instruction
- f. Group reading instruction
- g. A reading course (or courses)
- h. Pamphlets on reading strategies (identifying themes, etc.)
- i. Individual instruction in oral communication
- j. Group instruction in oral communication
- k. An oral communication course (or courses)
- l. Pamphlets on oral communication strategies (audience engagement, etc.)
- m. Online tutoring

- n. Faculty workshops
- o. Tutoring services for faculty
- p. Classroom presentations on writing center services
- q. Classroom presentations on aspects or details of writing
- r. Classroom presentations on aspects or details of reading
- s. Classroom presentations on aspects or details of oral communication
- t. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

It might seem as though Question 2 addressed too many activities in too general of terms to produce meaningful results. However, the breadth of this question was designed primarily to avoid excluding any essential writing center functions from the survey. As one might expect when the goal of this study was to ascertain what differences exist between US and Colombian writing centers, I did not know for certain where those differences might lie or just how extensive they might be. This ignorance was an important factor in the generality of the response options for Question 2; I considered functions I had witnessed in writing centers I had worked in, visited, or researched as well as those I had seen advertised on Colombian writing center websites, then framed those functions in general terms in an effort to catch all relevant activities. To further guard against accidental exclusion, however, I included an “Other (please specify)” response option.

Question 3 existed primarily to shore up weaknesses in Question 2 due to the response options’ breadth and the small respondent population size by allowing me additional insight into what writing center functions these professionals considered to be most essential. Like the “Other” option for Question 2, Question 3 offered respondents another opportunity to elaborate on their answers to Question 2. The question read, “Of the services listed above, which do you

consider to be most essential to carrying out the mission of your center? Why?” This opportunity for more specificity allowed respondents to explain what functions within the Question 2 categories they relied on most, and the expectation that they would do so seemed reasonable given that they were discussing the functions on which their centers primarily rely. Thus, they would likely feel proud of or committed to those operations (if not both) and consequently wish to explain the operations on which they depended.

Questions 4-7 came directly from McKinney’s study, since I wanted to measure the same qualities she did and since the questions appeared to contain no elements that would transfer poorly from their original US context to a Colombian context. The only significant change I made was to limit questions 6 and 7 to Colombian centers rather than all writing centers, since I wanted respondents to consider the writing centers only in their general area, not to compare their centers with writing centers worldwide. Questions 4-7 read as follows:

4. In your own words, what is a writing center?
5. How do you describe the role of your writing center to others at your own school?
6. In what ways do you think your writing center is different from other Colombian writing centers?
7. In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other Colombian writing centers?

As in McKinney’s survey, these questions addressed respondents’ understanding of their writing center’s purpose, goals, and identity; its practical function and value to their institution and higher education in general; what made their writing center unique; and what their writing center shared in common with other writing centers (McKinney 62). In examining what respondents believed these centers had in common, Question 7 thus offered another angle (in addition to

those in questions 4 and 5) from which to examine what respondents considered essential to the makeup of a writing center. These four questions worked together to offer insight into the narrative that Colombian writing center professionals were internalizing and propagating because the questions prompted them to explain their goals, purpose, and practical function. As in McKinney's study, the similarities between respondents' answers illuminated what aspects of writing center work Colombian professionals preferred to highlight, providing insight into what they viewed as the most important functions they perform.

### *Timeline*

Collecting survey responses took about three weeks total from the time I sent out the survey link until I closed the survey. The timing of this study was appropriate in terms of both its contribution to the field and its convenience for participants. With respect to the field of writing center studies, the timing for performing this study was appropriate because Colombian writing centers have been in operation for just over a decade (the first center was established at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali in 2008), so they have had enough time to begin to adjust to their environments (Calle Álvarez "Perspectiva" 149). It could be argued that a longer period for development would be helpful to get more complete results. However, since McKinney's study was performed in 2011, her findings could lose currency if this study were significantly delayed, which would make comparison between US and Colombian centers more difficult. For my participants' convenience, I chose to perform this study around the middle of the spring semester of 2020, when most faculty and academic support personnel would be engaged in their work and therefore checking their email regularly, expecting to interact with other academics, and actively thinking about the goals, challenges, and practical demands of their positions. Sending the survey around the midpoint of the semester also increased the likelihood that it would be open during

participants' spring breaks, for those who had them, when participants might be less busy and thus more willing to participate than they would otherwise be. This timing turned out to be fortuitous because the survey closed prior to the national shutdown due to COVID-19 that interrupted standard operating procedures for many workers.

### *Ethical Considerations*

#### Consent

When participants followed the survey link contained in the recruitment email, they found a consent document that they had to affirm having read before they could proceed to the survey itself. Modeled on a template for consent documents from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University, the consent page explained my study, its purpose, and the procedures, risks, benefits, compensation method, and confidentiality measures associated with participating in the study. The risks were minimal, since they were equal to the risks participants would encounter in everyday life. The consent document also included information on the voluntary nature of the study, on how to withdraw from the study, and on ways to contact me or my thesis chair in case of questions.

#### Anonymity

So that respondents could submit the survey anonymously, I included a box for them to check signifying consent at the bottom of the consent information page instead of requiring a signature. Participants could not proceed to the survey unless they checked that box. Each survey question appeared on a different page, with a status bar at the top of the screen displaying the percent of survey completed so participants could keep track of their progress through the survey. Respondents could move back and forth between pages, so if they desired to change or review a previous answer they could do so if they had not yet submitted an answer to the final

question. Even though respondents entered their names and mailing addresses, they did not do so until they reached the end of the survey itself. For those questions, they were automatically directed to a separate survey that requested this identifying information but separated it from their survey responses to maintain anonymity. After receiving all responses, I stored the data on an external hard drive that I encrypted and password-protected to ensure the security of the information.

Maintaining participants' anonymity raised another ethical issue, since I could not check back with participants whose answers I found unclear in any way. This posed problems for translation, especially. Since most of my readers did not have a reading knowledge of Spanish, my translations were their only means of interacting with the data, making it imperative that I accurately expressed what participants intended. To decrease the impact of any mistakes I made in translation, I made sure to work with the data in Spanish and to bring English explanations into my analysis only after I expressed in Spanish the conclusions I drew from my participants' responses. I also paid my translator for the survey materials to review and edit my translations of respondents' answers to confirm that they were represented fairly, and her expertise was invaluable.

To help me stay true to participants' answers despite my inability to contact them, I compared respondents' answers, noting how they might depict the same situation from different points of view. This comparison fit my data because, due to my recruitment strategy, some institutions were overrepresented in the data set because they offered more emails than other institutions did. While this probability could not guarantee relative numbers of respondents from various institutions, many respondents named their institutions in their answers, confirming that some institutions were overrepresented compared to other institutions. To maintain anonymity, I

redacted and blacked out the institution names from the data in my appendices, but the identifying information offered some insight into which responses concerned the same institutional situations. Ultimately, though, I ensured ethical treatment of my respondents' answers by sticking to as literal of translations as possible while maintaining comprehensibility, and, in the few cases where I found the data unclear, I avoided using those passages as primary support for any of my conclusions.

### Compensation

I initially offered participants compensation in the form of a \$50 VISA gift card to encourage participation because my pool of possible subjects was so small. I later learned that these gift cards do not work internationally, so I instead compensated participants via Western Union money orders. To do so, I contacted participants again via email to explain the situation and confirm that the name they had originally included matched their legal name as it appeared on their government-issued ID, which was a requirement from Western Union for their receipt of the money order. Only participants who completed all survey questions and confirmed their legal names received the money order, which I sent within three days of each participant's confirmation. To prevent participants from submitting the survey multiple times, I utilized the Qualtrics "Prevent Ballot Box Stuffing" option, which prevents multiple submissions from the same IP address. Allowing participants to participate anonymously while still providing them compensation was important to me to avoid any situation in which participants might experience negative repercussions from their institutions because of information or points of view they expressed in the survey. To maintain anonymity while still collecting the information I needed to send compensation, I created the survey and name/address form in separate Qualtrics surveys to keep the responses in separate data sets. When respondents reached the end of the survey



questions, they were automatically directed to the second Qualtrics survey form, which made the user experience smooth and uninterrupted to encourage complete participation.

### Translation Philosophy

Turning the data from this study into comprehensible conclusions required that the data be translated from the language of the survey's respondents into that of the thesis's audience. Since translation always involves some measure of interpretation, the method of translation I used in translating respondents' answers from Spanish to English had the potential to harmfully manipulate non-Spanish-speaking readers' perceptions of my data and thus of the validity of my conclusions (Tymoczko 182). To reduce the scope of bias in shaping my translations of respondents' answers, my translation practice prioritized literal wording over equivalent sense (Munday 31-32). Of course, the complete elimination of bias in translation is impossible, and a strictly word-for-word translation is not entirely practical when a key goal of this thesis is to make the data understandable for English readers, but where feasible, I stuck to respondents' original wording and structure to help avoid the influence of my own bias in translating their answers. In cases where meaning seemed uncertain, I erred on the side of a word-for-word rather than sense-for-sense translation in Appendix B, believing that data should remain as objective and unaltered as possible to allow readers to fairly examine the evidence for my conclusions.

I shared these aims and the reasons for them with the person who translated my survey materials when she agreed to review and edit the translations I had done of the survey responses. While not a professional translator, she is a native Spanish speaker from Colombia and has had experience both in a Spanish writing center and in Colombian academics. Her feedback helped to shore up weaknesses and inconsistencies in the translations, since I translated them myself as a native English speaker with only an introductory level of Spanish proficiency. This review, for

which she was paid, was key to my effort to present respondents' ideas accurately and ethically, though some errors and weaknesses may well remain, especially in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the survey consisted of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The first two questions, which are multiple choice, I analyzed quantitatively by pooling results to generate a percentage of the prevalence of each option. The first question allowed me to compare the tutor makeup of various centers. Since tutors arguably form the foundation of practical writing center operation, I considered it important to know whom each center found most qualified to perform tutoring operations for its students before any other information. For example, a center whose tutors are all students likely emphasizes peer collaboration, while a center whose tutors are all professors might tend toward a more prescriptivist understanding of its role. Differences like these, viewed in conjunction with respondents' answers to the other questions, thus helpfully informed my understanding of the way each center "storied" itself. When I examined the results, I compared percentages of respondents who included each answer. In comparing these percentages, however, I also considered disparities in my recruitment. For example, due to the differences in emails available for potential participants, some institutions were overrepresented compared to others in my participant pool, and some types of tutors (students, professors, etc.) were overrepresented as well. I did not anticipate or receive a large proportion of "other" answers, so analysis of the answers to this question was fairly straightforward in that it involved almost exclusively quantitative analysis. The results from Question 1, taken in conjunction with research on Colombian writing centers and their development, gave me a foundation for understanding the context in which the other results of my survey existed, and the results for

Question 1 will also offer other researchers the opportunity to compare US and Colombian writing center staff composition should they wish to do so.

The goal of Question 2, like that of Question 1, was to offer further understanding of basic aspects of Colombian writing centers' functions, since programs reveal priorities and values. Without the context provided by these initial questions, the qualitative analysis I did on later questions would have been more difficult, both due to the absence of any objective criteria with which to compare each center's stated values and because of my position outside Colombian writing center culture. Though Question 2 addressed many activities in rather general terms, the breadth of this question helped to avoid excluding any essential writing center functions from the survey. My initial ignorance of the precise nature and extent of the differences between US and Colombian writing centers was an important factor in the generality of the response options for Question 2, so I framed the response options in general terms in an effort to catch all relevant activities. Moreover, since this study attempted a relatively broad analysis, Question 2 was narrow enough to support that goal. To further guard against accidental exclusion, however, I included an "Other (please specify)" response option, which had the added benefit of allowing respondents to indicate shortcomings of my survey in cases where their "other" answers communicated the same ideas I had associated with listed options.

The other five questions, which were short answer, I grouped according to key terms and ideas in order to deduce common themes in the data set. In analyzing my data this way, I imitated McKinney's method of analysis (McKinney 63). Though she coded for keywords due to the larger size of her data set while I looked for keywords manually, our analytical approaches were equivalent. This examination of repeated keywords operated as part of my narrative theory framework because it drew attention to the implications of details in my respondents'

descriptions of their work. In this manner, my analysis resembled other applications of narrative theory, which might analyze literary word choice—as Michael Lutz does in his essay “Poisoned Sight: Race and the Material Phantasm in *Othello*,” published in the *Journal of Narrative Theory* in fall 2019—or even the language of narratology itself, as Paul Dawson does in “Delving into the Narratological ‘Toolbox’: Concepts and Categories in Narrative Theory.” The goal of my analysis was to gain an understanding of how respondents think about writing centers by looking at what themes and patterns appeared most often in participants’ responses.

Like Question 2, Question 3 offered insight into centers’ values through their actions, but it went a step further in allowing respondents to explain why the functions they chose to discuss were so central to achieving their center’s goals. That “why” allowed me to get a sense of the ways these writing centers’ self-storying manifested in their practical operations. Question 3 also assisted me in analyzing my results for Question 2 by offering a qualitative measure of which functions were most important to Colombian writing center professionals. Though my analysis of Question 2 attempted to answer that question quantitatively, the qualitative measure was important because, with such a small subject population, quantitative analysis is less reliable than it would be with a larger subject population. Therefore, additional information about which functions each subject finds most important helped me understand the results to Question 2 more fully even as it encouraged respondents to express more clearly a dimension of how they see the purposes and goals of writing center work.

Since questions 4-7 came directly from McKinney’s study, I applied the same kind of analysis to them that she did in her study. Once I had collected all the responses to each question, I examined answers for repeated words, phrases, or ideas to reveal the patterns in my respondents’ views of their work. I took special note of terms that seemed to reveal participants’

understanding of their writing center's purpose, goals, and identity; its practical function and value to their institution and higher education in general; what made their writing center unique; and what their writing center shared in common with other writing centers. As I analyzed the responses, I also considered how my data set compared to McKinney's data and conclusions, using her work as a baseline to illuminate ways the presentation of Colombian writing center work differed from that of similar work in the US. Thus, participants' responses to these four questions offered insight into the narrative that Colombian writing center professionals have internalized and propagated through the way they explained their goals, purpose, and practical function, and the responses were also characterized by meaningful distinctions from US writing center narratives.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter covered the procedures, design, information resources, timeliness, and other such essential aspects of the development, execution, and analysis of this study. It examined McKinney's framework for her study and the relevant narrative theory context that underlay both McKinney's study and this one, covering ideas essential to the analysis that appears in chapters 4-5. Along with this theoretical groundwork, the chapter reviewed how the methods of data collection from the study served as practical applications of the theory explained in Chapter 2. Some dimensions of this data collection included the study's timeline and timeliness, and it also covered such ethical considerations as recruitment, anonymity, and compensation. Further aspects of data collection covered in this chapter included my approach to gaining consent, the reasons behind my selection and use of the survey platform, and the survey content itself. The final section, which covered the analytical approach I used to interpret the data, drew on all the information in this chapter and in Chapter 2 as it turned theory into practice. The remaining

chapters of this thesis focus on results. Chapter 4 contains summary and analysis of the survey responses, while Chapter 5 builds on that analysis to present the conclusions of this study, as well as limitations and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 4 – Survey Results

In this chapter, I summarized the twelve respondents' answers to the survey and identified patterns in their responses that helped to answer the central research questions of the study. These patterns were identified using the narrative theory framework discussed in Chapter 3. The quantitative analysis on questions 1-2 consisted of comparing percentages of responses that included each option. Because respondents could select more than one answer for each of these questions, the total percentage for each question exceeded 100%. Questions 3-7 required qualitative analysis because they were short-answer questions. To analyze these responses, I utilized a narrative theory approach consistent with the principles of McKinney's analysis in her study, looking at repeated terms and ideas to identify common themes in the data. This analysis often looked a bit different in this chapter than it did in McKinney's discussion of her results, since my data set was much smaller. Out of concern for biasing based on the small data set, I leaned more heavily on the patterns of ideas that I found by carefully reading the responses than on repeated word choice alone; while McKinney and I used both approaches, we differed in which approach we utilized most (McKinney 63-65). Both approaches, however, rest on the same narrative theory foundation, which examines word choice and phrasing for what it highlights and what it obscures to discern the stories people implicitly tell themselves and others in order to make sense of their lives (Bruner "Self-Making" 36).

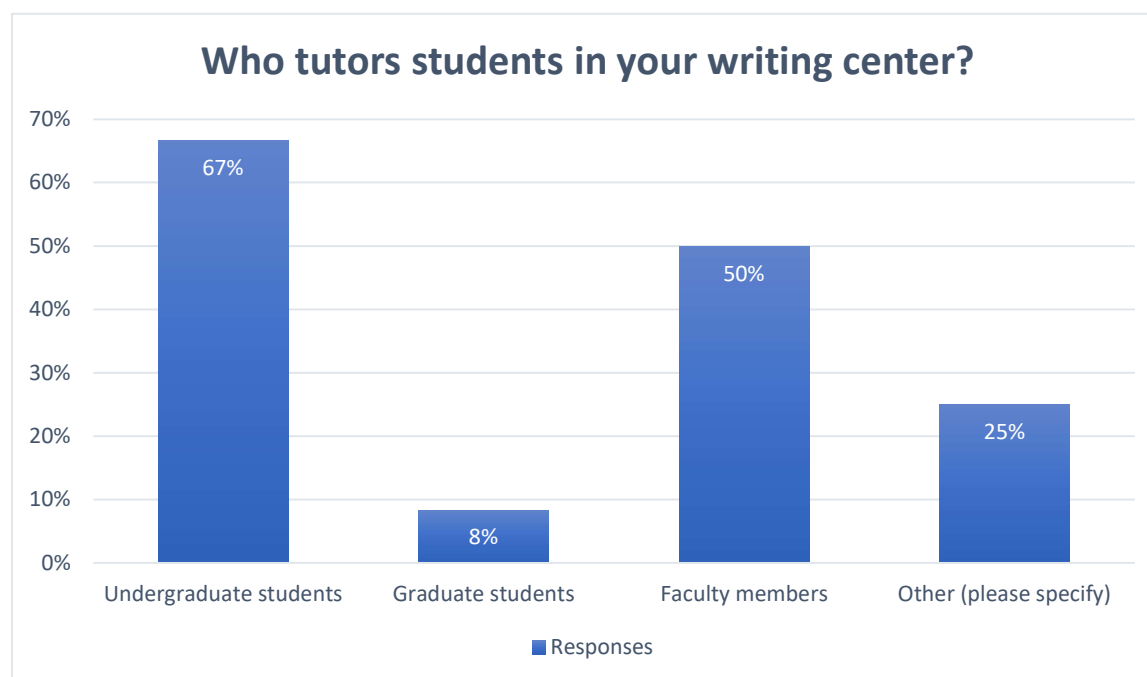
As I analyzed all the data, I kept in mind that my survey may have had 12 respondents, but those respondents did not represent 12 different institutions, nor did they represent an even mix of roles within their center. Though the survey did not ask respondents to clarify their institutions or roles within writing center work, the emails I sent out when recruiting participants

could not be evenly distributed because of the inequitable distribution of publicly available email addresses on writing center websites.

The answers to the survey revealed the aspects of writing center work that respondents chose to foreground, including one-to-one tutoring and the importance of writing, reading, and orality services (in that order), which offered a glimpse into the narratives Colombian writing center professionals used to organize and interpret their experiences. The resemblances between these narratives pointed to a grand narrative shared among Colombian writing center professionals, as McKinney's book did for US centers. The goal of this chapter was to summarize the results without interpretation, while the interpretation appears in Chapter 5 in the form of final conclusions. I placed the raw data, including all responses to every question, in Appendices A and B so that interested readers may search for patterns beyond those I identify, but in this chapter I endeavored to communicate the voice and the story contained in my participants' responses.



## Question 1



Question 1 asked, “Who tutors students in your writing center? Please select all that apply.” In their responses, participants identified undergraduate students as the most-used group for writing center tutoring. Faculty members were a close second, since one respondent who did not select “Faculty members” included an “Other” response that consisted only of the word “professors.” Taking that response into account, the percentage of respondents who identified faculty members as a group responsible for writing center tutoring was 58%. Graduate students were the most infrequently used group at only 8% (1 response). Only three respondents (25%) submitted “Other” answers, one of which has been mentioned already. Of the other two, one referenced adjunct faculty (but, since that respondent also selected “Faculty Members,” the “Other” response was not relevant to that statistic), and the other similarly offered more information on which professors and students tutor in that writing center.

In their responses to Question 1, participants' significant preferences for undergraduate student and professor tutors (67% and 58%, respectively) indicated a nearly equal reliance on undergraduate student and professor tutors. This near-equivalent frequency of use showed a greater reliance on individuals with more education than is common in the literature on writing center work in the US, since US writing centers seldom utilize professors as tutors (Harris "Collaboration" 279; Trimbur 289; Weissbach and Pflueger 206). Moreover, all the "Other" answers discussed the roles of faculty members in the writing center, while only 33% discussed student tutors.

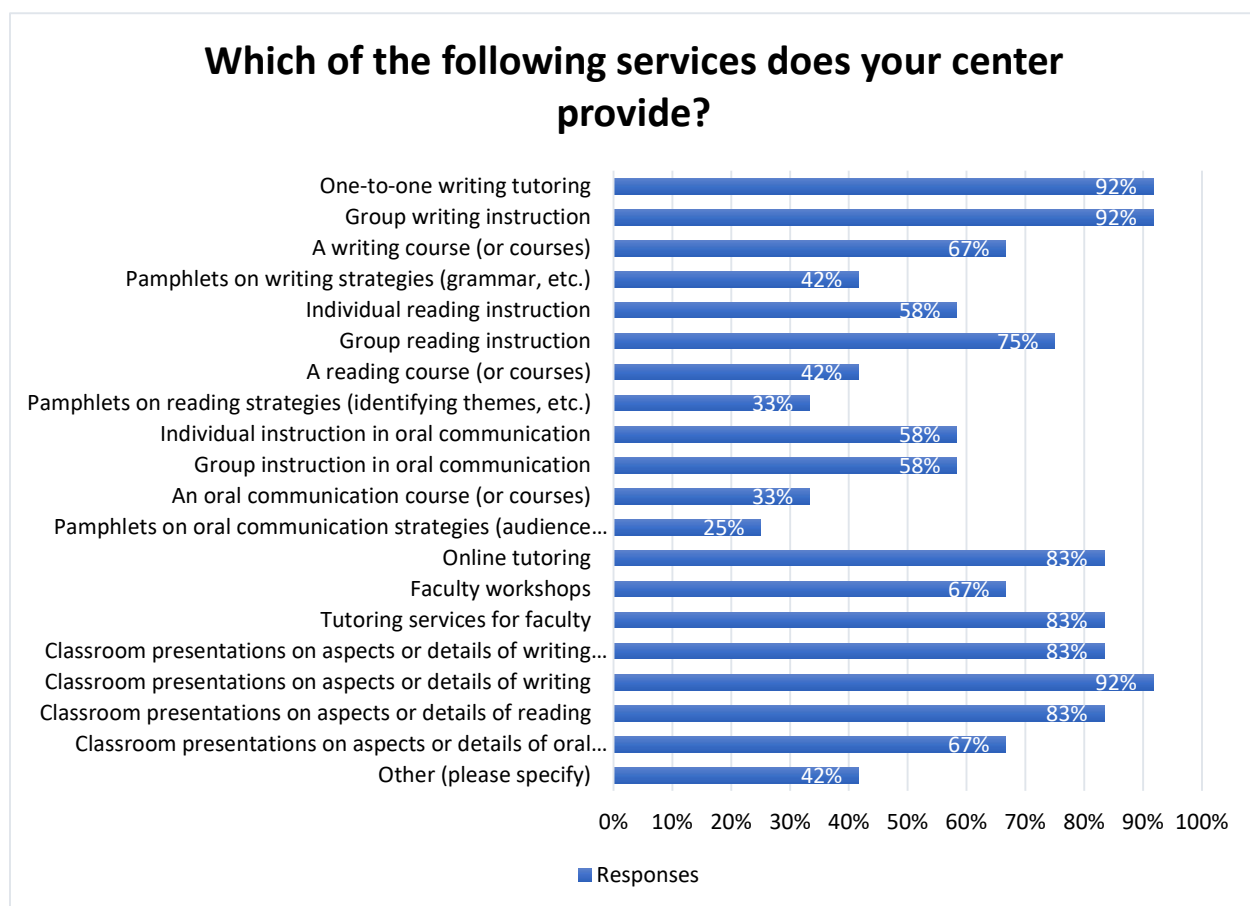
This near-equivalent focus and reliance on individuals who were presumably more familiar with writing center theory, or at least with academic conversations and philosophy, than undergraduate students might be due to the relative newness of writing center work in Colombian institutions of higher education. It seemed unlikely that the reason would be tutor training, or lack thereof, since many of the responses to later questions emphasized tutor training, and some participants even described the mentorship programs or training courses they used to equip tutors for effective work. Moreover, the literature on Colombian writing centers indicates that tutor training is an important focus in Latin American writing centers, which modeled their tutor training programs on those at prestigious US universities such as Princeton, Harvard, and NYU (Calle Arango et al. 889-90).

Another possible reason for this difference in tutoring staff could involve cultural differences in US and Colombian views of academic authority figures. If, as Diaz-Guerrero and Szalay suggest, Colombian students view their teachers more as friends than as institutional representatives and therefore perceive "little indication of social distance" in these more personal relationships compared to the way US students view their teachers, this aspect of Colombian

academic culture could explain why using faculty tutors was not problematic in Colombian writing centers (133). US centers avoid this strategy because the more formal, knowledge-based nature of US teacher-student relationships makes collaboration much more difficult than it is with a peer, who appears non-threatening by comparison. The professors' age and status as either tenured or adjunct faculty may also contribute to the closeness of the professor-student relationship suggested by Diaz-Guerrero and Szalay. Since one respondent considered the difference between adjunct and tenured faculty important enough to mention in an "Other" answer to Question 1 of the survey, it is reasonable to acknowledge that students may feel more comfortable with younger or lower-ranking faculty members than with tenured faculty. However, further research would be necessary to confirm such an argument, which is outside the scope of this study.

It could be interesting, as part of future studies, to see if this trend of utilizing professor tutors will continue or if Colombian writing centers will shift to relying more exclusively on students for tutoring as centers become more established in the country.

## Question 2



Question 2 asked, “Which of the following services does your center provide? Please select all that apply.” In their answers, nearly every respondent (92%) listed “one-to-one writing tutoring,” “group writing instruction,” and “classroom presentations on aspects or details of writing” as services their writing center provides. Online tutoring, tutoring services for faculty, and classroom presentations on reading or on writing center services were also among the most popular services at 83% each, and group reading instruction followed closely thereafter at 75%. The least offered services were pamphlets on oral communication strategies (25%), oral communication courses (33%), and pamphlets on reading strategies (33%). More generally,

respondents' centers tended to utilize pamphlets less often than any other medium (though oral communication courses formed an outlier). However, even in this less-used medium, the trend of writing held as the most-used service, followed by reading and then by orality services. Across all categories, writing centers tended to focus much more heavily on writing than on any other category, while reading was more of a focus than orality but significantly less so than writing. Respondents' "Other" services included community-focused initiatives, teacher-requested workshops, interdisciplinary work, and extra services designed to help students understand and adjust to international writing standard differences.

The "Other" response concerning teacher-requested workshops—"Talleres dirigidos por tutores solicitadas por docente en asignaturas de todas las carreras [Workshops directed by tutors requested by a teacher in subjects from all majors]"—revealed a shortcoming in the response options even while acting as the safeguard I intended in creating the question. The response revealed a shortcoming because I had thought the option for "faculty workshops" covered the same concept. I did not consider that "faculty workshops" could refer to workshops attended by faculty, run by faculty, or run by tutors during class time at the request of a faculty member. However, the inclusion of the "Other" option allowed the respondent to clarify their meaning, so it guarded against accidental exclusion and thus functioned as intended.

The high proportion of centers offering one-to-one writing tutoring, group writing instruction, and classroom presentations on writing (92%) supported the idea that writing is the most universally prioritized focus of these writing centers. In this respect, these centers resemble US writing centers, which generally focus on writing alone (Mackiewicz and Thompson "Spoken Written-Language" 47; Lochman 19). While responses indicated that they are not as frequently included as writing services, reading and orality also constituted important subjects of

Colombian writing center work, which marks a difference between Colombian and US centers and fits with the literature (Salazar-Sierra 56; Torres Perdigón 326; Calle Álvarez “Perspectiva” 159; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84; Calle-Arango “Practicas” 157). Reading was more popular than orality, which also fits with Colombian writing center literature (Soares Soto et al. 424; Moreno Mosquero and Baracaldo Lozano 11; Salazar-Sierra et al. 56). These responses to Question 2 reflect centers that are more broadly focused than US writing centers, since they work with students on more aspects of communication than just writing.

Because the “Other” answers to Question 2 were widely divergent, they did not communicate a simple resemblance between the centers. However, they exhibited a community-oriented attitude, whether referencing “curso de ortografía, jornadas para bachilleres [spelling bees, workshops for high school students],” “acompañamiento en el proceso de escritura de estudiantes de intercambio [accompaniment in the writing process for exchange students],” or “servicios de tutorías para trabajadores de la universidad y para la comunidad en general [tutorial services for university workers and for the community in general].” These answers and others like them seemed to imply that Colombian writing centers value community relations highly and prioritize activities related to strengthening those ties. Each “Other” answer focused on benefiting some community and fostering relational ties there, from international relations or local society to academic communities such as those between faculty members or between faculty and tutors. This is not to say that US writing centers have no concern for their contexts or do not prioritize their communities, but the focus of much US writing center literature seems to focus more on helping students as individuals than as part of a community. This more individualized focus appears even in McKinney’s statement of US writing centers’ grand narrative, which states that a writing center is where “all students go” for individualized help (3).

This wording involves individuals acting rather than the cooperative approach that appears in the “Other” responses from Question 2.

### **Question 3**

Question 3 asked, “Of the services listed above, which do you consider to be most essential to carrying out the mission of your center? Why?” While many respondents listed different writing center functions in Question 2, all respondents identified individual tutoring as the most essential function of their writing center in their responses to Question 3. Even the respondent who did not include one-to-one tutoring in their answer to Question 2 identified tutoring as the center’s most essential function in Question 3. Respondents’ reasoning varied slightly, but most answers focused on collaborative tutoring’s ability to offer students personalized help with their individual difficulties in real time.

For example, one brief response read as follows: “Tutorías individuales a estudiantes y profesores por su carácter personalizado que favorece la detección y solución de problemas lecto-escritura [Individual tutorials for students and professors because of their personalized nature, which facilitates the identification and solution of reading and writing problems].” This response, like many of the others, highlights the importance of personalized, immediate interactions in writing center work. Another typical response also emphasized this personalization in writing center tutoring, stating:

Las tutorías personalizadas. Trabajar exclusivamente con una persona y dedicársele a ella optimiza el tiempo y los esfuerzos; además, hay que tener en cuenta que las demandas puedes [sic] ser muy diferentes de un sujeto a otro. [Personalized tutorials. Working exclusively with one person and focusing on him or her optimizes time and efforts; also, one should consider that the demands can be very different from one subject to another.]

This response focuses more on the costs of writing work and on the solutions that writing centers can offer, but it resembles the first in highlighting the personalized nature of a writing conference before anything else. The second response communicates the importance of this point by stating it three times—once by identifying tutorials as “personalized,” once by referencing the exclusivity of one-to-one appointments, and once by reiterating that the tutor’s focus is on the one person with whom the tutor is working. Like this second response, several other answers also mentioned related benefits, such as efficiency, success in improving students’ writing skills, or the importance of those skills in an academic environment.

The answers to Question 3 all focused on individual tutoring as the most essential function of the respondents’ writing centers. These answers closely resembled contemporary US writing center theory, which also places a heavy emphasis on individual tutoring appointments as the core of writing center work. Specifically, in McKinney’s formulation of the US writing center grand narrative, she identifies “one-on-one tutoring” as the prime function of writing centers, much as Harris lists “Each student’s individual needs are the focus of the tutorial” as the third of six essential aspects of writing center praxis (“SLATE Statement”). This piece of McKinney’s grand narrative, at least, Colombian writing center professionals appear to share.

The reasoning respondents included in their answers to Question 3 also resembled US writing center theory and praxis. Common explanations included the value of collaboration and individualized help, with a focus on strengthening students’ writing weaknesses. Other benefits respondents mentioned in their answers included “la detección y solución de problemas lecto-escritura [the identification and solution of reading and writing problems]”—in other words, effective work that produces positive results—and efficiency, since “se puede ayudar al estudiante de manera clara y concisa [the student can be helped in a clear and concise manner].”



Respondents also related personalized tutoring to the value of writing skills and thus of writing center work in an academic environment, noting for example that “se ocupa de la lectura, escritura y oralidad en la columna vertebral de la educación [they deal with reading, writing, and orality as the backbone of education].” US centers also share this reasoning behind the value respondents placed on individual tutoring appointments; they, too, value the collaborative aspect of tutoring and include it in their self-storying for both practical and theoretical reasons that much resemble those mentioned by the respondents in this study (Lunsford 92; Powers 374; Harris “Collaboration” 272). The answers to Question 3 indicated that the core of writing center work in Colombia and in the US still closely resemble one another, and the perception of the tutoring appointment itself appeared unchanged.

#### **Question 4**

Question 4 asked, “In your own words, what is a writing center?” Participants’ answers to Question 4 varied more widely, but common threads remained in the concepts they discussed and the words they used. Seven responses emphasized writing centers’ role in preparing students to be successful academically or discussed their goal of getting students to a point at which they no longer need the writing center’s help. Six emphasized peer tutors’ roles as collaborators or their roles in shifting students’ views of writing from product-oriented to process-oriented. Some terms that surfaced frequently in discussions of writing centers’ role were “escritura” (writing—11 responses), “lectura” (reading—eight responses), and “oralidad” or related words (orality—five responses). Most responses referred to the writing center as an “espacio” (space), “sitio” (site), or “lugar” (place)—all place-related words—while two respondents specified that the writing center is not a physical space but a moment characterized by the collaborative dynamic created between a tutor and a tutee as they generate learning through their dialogue.

One typical response that includes these ideas said:

Un centro de escritura es un espacio creado para que una comunidad pueda fortalecer su competencia escrita (pero también lectora y oral). Un centro de escritura no es un espacio remedial o asistencialista<sup>1</sup>; su objetivo debe ser empoderar al tutorado para que llegue el día en el que no necesite asistir [A writing center is a space created so that a community can strengthen its writing competency (but also reading and orality). A writing center is not a remedial or stopgap space; its objective should be to empower the tutee so that the day comes when [he or she] does not need to attend].”

This final inclusion of student agency was an uncommon focus among the responses, but this response was typical in identifying the center as a space that deals with writing, reading, and orality; its inclusion of reading and orality in parentheses reflected the greater weight most responses placed on writing as the primary work of a writing center without excluding the other two subjects that appeared in many of the responses. In contrast to the dominant focus on the writing center as a place, one other respondent referred to the writing center as a “programa” (program) rather than as a space of any kind.

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<sup>1</sup> This word has no exact English equivalent. It does not have an entry in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, the official Spanish dictionary published by the Real Academia Española. Oxford’s *Lexico* does not contain “asistencialista” but does have an entry for “asistencialismo,” which it defines as “Actitud política orientada a resolver problemas sociales a partir de la asistencia externa en lugar de generar soluciones estructurales. [Political attitude focused on resolving social problems by means of external assistance in place of creating structural solutions.]” The example Spanish sentences and English translations of “asistencialista” from external sources on Linguee and SpanishDict confirm a related usage. Though these translations are not reviewed, the combination of 38 sample sentences from website usage indicates a meaning related to “asistencialismo,” as does the WordReference forum discussion of “asistencialista.” The only major change in the Oxford entry is the suffix, which refers to a movement, system, or attitude (asistencialismo) rather than to a person associated with that movement, system, or attitude (asistencialista). Based on all the sources I have mentioned, “asistencialista” refers to an approach to fixing a (usually political or social) problem by addressing the surface issues but neglecting the underlying problems. So while it does have a dimension related to “assistance” or “help,” it also has a negative connotation.

While the answers to Question 4 contained more variety than those to Question 3, the more common elements resembled some of those identified by US writing center professionals in McKinney's study. As stated in Chapter 1, McKinney's study phrased US writing center professionals' grand narrative as follows: "*writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*" (3). None of the respondents in this study mentioned anything resembling the "iconoclastic" idea from this statement, and the "all students" idea was far less emphasized. Where the idea appeared, it came across more as an assertion of the writing center's helpfulness to everyone in a community than as an attempt to convince students that their writing is neither too strong nor too weak to benefit from the writing center. A couple of respondents emphasized the writing center's non-remedial nature, but this kind of statement about purpose is not the same as specifying various levels of students who can all find something valuable in the writing center. While the former defines a conflict between the expectations that people often bring to the writing center, the latter seeks to expand the audience's perception of how the writing center can exhibit versatility in assisting students at all levels. Thus, while elements of these responses might initially seem somewhat reminiscent of the idea McKinney communicates using the phrase "all students," the responses in this survey did not lend themselves to McKinney's conclusion about how US writing center professionals characterize those who utilize their services.

In a further distinction from McKinney's conclusion, only one respondent emphasized the importance of comfort in the writing center in answering Question 4, but most respondents described a writing center as a place ("espacio," "sitio," or "lugar"). This is not to say that these centers all inhabit independent spaces within the university; respondents did not include details about the spaces they occupy, and some Colombian centers operate in libraries or cafes instead

of permanently designated spaces (Soares Soto et al. 430; “Inicio”; “Ubicación”). The details of what these centers look like are outside the scope of this study since none of the questions asked for or generated this information. Whatever these spaces look like, most respondents’ wording appeared to agree with McKinney’s statement in characterizing the writing center as a physical setting. However, two respondents who used such terminology carefully differentiated their views from that more concrete understanding. Instead of viewing the writing center as a physical place, they focused more on the moment in a tutor and tutee’s dialogue in which learning is generated. Somewhat similarly, another respondent referred to the writing center as a program rather than using a place-related word. Together, these outlier responses constitute 25% of respondents. This more metaphysical view of writing center work has intriguing implications, but since this study is primarily concerned with the views expressed by the majority of Colombian writing center professionals, those implications are beyond the scope of this thesis. While the portion of respondents who differed from the majority is substantial, the far more prevalent view of writing centers cast them as physical spaces, even though respondents did not focus on how those spaces were designed.

Moreover, the frequency with which respondents mentioned the terms “escritura” (writing), “lectura” (reading), and “oralidad” (orality) to describe what they saw as writing centers’ role confirmed the observations that sparked this study: Colombian writing centers are focusing on more aspects of communication than writing, and the reading and orality dimensions of their work strike them as essential, unlike the majority of US writing centers (Carillo 118; Mackiewicz and Thompson “Spoken Written-Language” 47; Lochman 28). The survey responses did not include detailed descriptions of how reading and orality tutoring occurs in these centers, but as was mentioned in Chapter 2, such details are beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Question 5

Question 5 asked, “How do you describe the role of your writing center to others at your own school?” In their responses, participants focused primarily on the role of writing centers in generating understanding through the collaborative process of a tutoring appointment (6 responses) and in improving writers rather than merely texts (6 responses). A typical response stated:

Es una labor necesaria y de gran ayuda para todos los asistentes al Centro. La oportunidad de contar con personas que cuenten con las habilidades para ayudar a otro en procesos de escritura, oralidad o lectura es gratificante y se ve reflejado en los aprendizajes que los tutorados generan en las sesiones o durante las diferentes actividades que el Centro realiza. [It is a necessary work and of great help for all attendees to the Center. The opportunity to count on people who have skills to help another in writing, orality, or reading processes is gratifying and is reflected in the learning that the tutors generate in the sessions or during the different activities that the Center runs.]

This response reflected the concern and respect for writers that many of these responses displayed as they focused on the help they could offer writers through the collaborative tutoring process. Nine respondents specifically mentioned writing as one of the essential functions of their centers, while five mentioned reading and two mentioned orality. Regarding the writing centers’ benefits to various groups, six responses mentioned students, two mentioned professors, and two mentioned the community in a larger sense, though both specified that they referred to the academic community and one included the corporate community as well. Only one respondent focused on describing the writing center as a safe, comfortable place.

Participants' responses to Question 5 focused primarily on the role writing centers play in generating understanding through a collaborative process in tutoring appointments and on their goal of improving writers rather than merely their texts. These ideas align well with recent and traditional writing center theory in the US, as do the respondents' focuses on students and writing as pillars of their purpose. Reading and speech still appeared as priorities, but they were mentioned significantly fewer times than writing. Since this question asked respondents to briefly communicate the most essential features of their work to someone unfamiliar with writing centers, the frequency of responses that included writing indicates its importance to Colombian writing center work. The responses to this question contained a greater emphasis on helping students than any other group, but, as the quoted response demonstrates, many respondents referred to visitors to the writing center without identifying a group to which they belong. Therefore, the responses seemed to reflect a primary focus on helping writers, regardless of their position in the institution of higher education, though students might be the most common visitors to the center. This accords well with McKinney's grand narrative, which cites students as the group primarily benefitting from writing center work.

The respondents' statements did not, however, focus on the writing center being a safe, comfortable place; an iconoclastic force within academia; or a domain of all students. While one respondent did emphasize the comfortable nature of a writing center, that aspect did not form part of the central focus in any of the other answers, lending it a great deal less weight in this study than it received in McKinney's analysis. She does state that only "a few respondents also described the space as 'safe,' 'comfortable,' or 'friendly,' words that invoke the 'writing centers as cozy' trope," but she does not clarify why, despite these relatively few responses, she chose to include this element in the grand narrative statement she constructed (McKinney 63). She may

have included it because it did appear in her responses and it seemed to reflect the literature as a whole, but my research into Colombian writing centers did not indicate that the “‘writing centers as cozy’ trope” plays a significant role in Colombian writing center theory (McKinney 62-63).

The iconoclastic identity that US writing centers claim did not appear to influence responses to Question 5, and (more surprisingly) neither did the emphasis that US centers place on serving all students, regardless of their level or background. In McKinney’s data from 117 respondents’ answers to the same questions that constitute questions 4-7 of my survey, the word “all” was used 104 times, and the terms “student” and “students” appeared 362 times compared to only 81 mentions of “faculty,” “professors,” and “teachers” (63-64). In contrast, the words “estudiante” and “estudiantes” appeared in the data from my survey’s final four questions—the same questions McKinney used for the data she gathered—28 times, 9 of which referred to student tutors rather than tutees. McKinney’s sample size was much larger than mine, but the ratio of word use to total number of responses for “student(s)” in McKinney’s data set is .77, while the ratio of word use to total number of responses for “estudiante(s)” in my data set was .58. This ratio also includes references to student tutors, since McKinney’s analysis did not specify the context of “student(s)” in her data set, and it does not account for multiple uses of these words in single responses. Though imperfect, these ratios help to illustrate that the frequency of references to students was much lower in my data than in McKinney’s study, which seemed to indicate a lesser degree of focus on students as the sole or primary beneficiaries of the writing center.

A couple of respondents to Question 5 of my survey did mention the versatility of writing center work as relevant to many aspects of the writing process, but the focus of those statements was primarily on the benefits of the tutoring process rather than on the recipients of those

benefits. The only nod to diversity in the population these centers serve that featured in a significant portion of the responses was the reference some responses contained to groups besides students (professors and community members, specifically) whom their centers also benefitted. The way these responses discussed the populations they serve revealed a different emphasis and way of seeing their work than did the responses from US centers that McKinney received in her study. For example, one respondent stated, “Es una labor en aras del aprendizaje. El objetivo de esta es dar inicio y continuidad a lo [sic] procesos de aprendizaje de escritura académica. [It is work for the sake of learning. The objective of this is to begin and give continuity to the processes of learning about academic writing.]” Rather than viewing writing center work as primarily task-focused, responses like this one characterized it as primarily benefit-focused. Another respondent said:

Es una labor de guía [sic] y aprendizaje mutuo, debido a que es un proceso en el cual servimos como instrumento para los estudiantes/ docentes, ayudando a fortalecer las falencias que tengan en lectura y escritura, además, como todo proceso académico el aprendizaje es mutuo. [It is a work of mutual guidance and learning, inasmuch as it is a process in which we serve as an instrument for the students/teachers, helping to improve the weaknesses that they have in reading and writing; also, as in every academic process, the learning is mutual.]

This response depicted the benefits of the writing center as coming out of partnership, but it did not emphasize this partnership as one between unique individuals. Instead, all references to people appeared in plural form, which helped keep the comment generalized rather than particular even as it highlighted the value of interaction. These two responses distilled elements common to the other responses by highlighting the benefits and relational nature of writing



center work. This portrayal of Colombian writing center work fits with the literature, which refers even to its institutional clientele as an academic community, thus emphasizing connectedness rather than individuality and uniqueness (Molina-Natera “Discurso Pedagógico” 126; Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84; Chinchilla Cogollo et al. 140). US writing centers would acknowledge these ideas to some extent, particularly with regard to the importance of collaboration (North 70; Lunsford 92), but they do not form the central focus of (for example) answers to the equivalent question in McKinney’s study, indicating at least some difference in values and priorities in constructing their stories.

### **Question 6**

Question 6 asked, “In what ways do you think your writing center is different from other Colombian writing centers?” The respondents’ answers were all distinct, with relatively little in common. Two noted their use of both professors and students as tutors, while another specified that the associated center only uses undergraduate students, and a couple of responses focused on the training tutors receive. One center differentiated itself by its flexibility in developing other writing centers, another focused on follow-ups rather than one-time appointments, another emphasized services offered to professors, another on student preparedness and confidence in facing new reading and writing challenges, and yet another on continual research and development. No two respondents gave the same answer, as even those who focused on the types of tutors they employ elaborated on training or some other aspect of their setup that was not mentioned (or specifically differentiated) in any other response.

For instance, three participants differentiated their centers from other Colombian writing centers in the following responses:

- Response 1: En el Centro de Lectura y Escritura de la Universidad [REDACTED] (Colombia) contamos con tutores profesores y tutores estudiantes; además, los tutores estudiantes forman parte de un sistema académico de formación permanente, propiciado por el mismo centro a través de los profesores. [In the Reading and Writing Center of the [REDACTED] University (Colombia) we count on professor and student tutors; also, the student tutors form part of a permanent academic system of formation, fostered by the same center through the professors.]
- Response 2: El proceso no se trata solo de una tutoría al semestre, sino de un acompañamiento, de modo que el estudiante fuera el mismo el que al final siguiera todos los pasos recomendados: Lectura cuidadosa, toma de ideas [sic], planeación, escritura de un borrador, revisión. [The process is not a matter of just one tutorial per semester, but an accompaniment, so that the student by the end will follow all the recommended steps: careful reading, idea taking, planning, writing from a draft, revision.]
- Response 3: El centro de escritura [REDACTED] es el primero que fue creado en la ciudad de [REDACTED], por tanto, este sirvió como base para que se desarrollaran espacios similares en todo el país. Aquí, se ofrecen distintos tipos de servicios que son flexibles y se adaptan a las diferentes necesidades que se van creando dentro del campus universitario. [The [REDACTED] writing center is the first that was created in the city of [REDACTED]; thus, this served as a basis so that similar spaces [could] be developed in the whole country. Here, distinct types of services are offered that are flexible and adapt to the different needs that are being created within the university campus.]

Each of these respondents succeeded in differentiating their center from the others described.

The first response focused on the kinds and training of tutors, the second on the experience

students have at the writing center, and the third on the writing center's role as an example to other writing centers throughout the country. The variety between these responses was representative of the data set, which included little overlap. The strongest parallel between the first two responses was that both focused on how the writing center helps another group of people through extended mentorship—the first had faculty tutors continually mentor undergraduate tutors, and the second related the semester-long partnership that characterizes the writing center's tutoring work. While these responses and the others like them might bear few explicit similarities, they helped to craft a story of helpfulness, kindness, and care over time as characteristic of their writing center operations. Though the third response did not address mentorship or portray its operations as altruistic, it contained the related idea of modeling; it implied that the center sets an example for other writing centers throughout the country, which helps them to develop and shapes their growth. Many of the responses to this question presented their centers as warmly engaging with their communities, but even those that lacked this warmth mentioned interpersonal connections and demonstrated a value for helping other people.

Question 6 challenged the repeated-word-based analysis I have been using thus far because the answers were so widely divergent. The divergence in the responses seemed to communicate that participants clearly understood how the other centers in Colombia operate, since they all described unique situations. This could imply that Colombian writing centers have effective communication with one another or follow one another's innovations closely. However, since so many of them focused on separate categories as well as details in differentiating themselves, the answers made it difficult to discern meaningful patterns in the data with any certainty. At the very least, all respondents had a strong focus in their responses on either tutors, tutees, or the center's relationship with and contributions to the surrounding community, which

indicated a consistent focus on people and the benefits the center could offer them. One response that exemplified this theme stated:

El Centro de Escritura [REDACTED] se ve permeado por la filosofía institucional, por lo que, bajo los principios ignacianos, comprende que más allá de acompañar los procesos de escritura, se acompaña la construcción del ser. Es por esto que, bajo la premisa del Magis “Ser más para servir mejor”, nos encontramos, como tutores, en contante [sic] formación, para que tanto nosotros, como todas las personas que pasen por el centro, podamos ser mejores y poner nuestras experiencias al servicio de la comunidad. [The [REDACTED] Writing Center appears permeated by institutional philosophy, for which reason, under Ignatian principles, it understands that, beyond accompanying writing processes, it accompanies the construction of the being. It is for this reason that, under the premise of Magis to “become more to serve better,” we find ourselves as tutors in constant formation, so that we, as much as all the people that pass through the center, may be better and put our experience to the service of the community.]

Unlike other responses, many of which mentioned writing center operations, this answer focused exclusively on individual formation and contributions to one’s community. In focusing on the holistic personhood of those involved in writing center work, this response reflected a relational approach to writing center work by prioritizing being and being-in-community over measurable or academic results.

Unlike McKinney’s formulation of the US writing center grand narrative, which pictures students as coming to the writing center much like customers to a business, the responses to Question 6 were more person-centered and relationally focused, phrased in a way that emphasized how these centers make people’s lives better and build communities rather than

primarily focusing on their activities and including other people only incidentally as beneficiaries if they “go” out of their way to participate in what the writing center is already doing. In the same vein, while both Colombian and US centers focus on serving students, these responses indicated that Colombian writing centers place more emphasis on serving their larger communities than US centers do.

### **Question 7**

Question 7 asked, “In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other Colombian writing centers?” In their responses, participants again covered a wide array of topics, but some similar themes emerged in their answers. Fifty percent of respondents identified the strengthening of tutees’ skills in reading, writing, and/or orality as a similarity between their center and others. Forty-two percent mentioned individualized tutoring (in some cases, specifically its collaborative aspect) as a key point of similarity. Focuses on training tutors and/or teachers and on contributing to the context and community that produced the center showed up in 25% of responses. The response that resembled the greatest number of other responses listed the following attributes:

En su función de fortalecimiento de las habilidades y competencias de lectura, escritura y oralidad. En el desarrollo de investigaciones En la capacitación constante de docentes y tutores En su naturaleza de unidad académica de apoyo [In its function of strengthening abilities and competencies in reading, writing, and orality. In the development of research[.] In the constant training of teachers and tutors[.] In its nature as an academic support unit].

Most of the other responses were formatted in complete sentences, which made them sound more like narrative, but this response was notable because, despite its resemblance to a list, it

highlighted the functions of Colombian writing centers that the respondent portrayed as distinct operations by introducing each with a capital letter, which implied sentence divisions. Moreover, the high level of resemblance between this and other responses supported the accuracy and relevance of this list, lending it more weight as an accurate assessment. A couple of respondents (17%) also mentioned that students in various centers share similar weaknesses, such as grammar, which require centers to respond in a similar manner. One-time mentions reflecting themes in answers to previous questions included the importance of research in the writing center and writing centers' identity as academic support units.

Respondents' answers to Question 7, while again covering a wide array of topics, converged on some recognizable themes. The most common responses to this question focused on reading, writing, and/or orality training and individualized, collaborative tutoring. These responses reflected similar ideas to those expressed in responses to Questions 2 and 3, especially, but also throughout this survey. These responses thus reinforced the impression that these two elements—individual tutoring and reading, writing, and orality work—were vitally important to Colombian writing center professionals. Other notable results included tutor and teacher training (25% of respondents) and a deliberate focus on the center's community context and contribution (25%). The most common focus based on word choice was on students and other tutees—"estudiantes" and "tutorados," respectively, both of which referred to students and others benefiting from the writing center's tutoring services—appearing a total of seven times in the responses, which was more often than any other term. However, in context, this observation did not seem to reveal anything significant about Colombian writing centers' self-concept, since the responses referred quite as often to functions and abstract explanations of their work—a task-oriented approach—as they did to the person-centered orientation observed in responses to

previous questions. Significant results from responses to this question included a shared focus on strengthening the writing, reading, and orality skills of visitors to the writing center and on individualized, collaborative tutoring.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter analyzed survey data indicating how Colombian writing center professionals describe themselves and their work. Some of the most significant and frequently mentioned results of this survey included the following points:

- Writing services dominated those offered by Colombian writing centers, followed by reading and then by oral communication services.
- 100% of respondents identified individual writing tutoring as the most important service in achieving the goals and realizing the purpose of their writing centers.
- Most Colombian writing centers (67%) employed undergraduate students as tutors, and faculty members were also in high demand (58% of responses).
- Colombian writing centers emphasized community, which appeared in the responses through frequent mentions of helping groups of people through mentorship and collaboration.

The next chapter interprets these results to draw conclusions about the way Colombian writing center professionals choose to view themselves.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

The survey data analyzed in Chapter 4 and related in full in Appendices A and B are related in this chapter to the narrative theory framework discussed in Chapter 3. This discussion leads to conclusions that show how Colombian writing center professionals story their work, which answers the research questions driving this study. These questions are:

1. What grand narrative do Colombian writing center professionals imply their adherence to through the ways they describe their work?
2. How does that narrative compare to the one McKinney identified in US writing center professionals' descriptions of their work?
3. How can US writing centers learn from these differences?

This chapter compares respondents' answers to each question with equivalent practices in US writing centers and with McKinney's survey results and conclusions, then pulls those interpretations together to draw overall conclusions from the study. After stating and explaining those conclusions, I acknowledge limitations for this study and suggest avenues for further research.

### **Recap of Study Results**

The survey results indicated that Colombian writing centers rely primarily on undergraduate student and on faculty tutors; that writing resources are the most widely offered, followed by reading resources and then by oral speech resources; and that individual writing tutoring is felt to be the most important function in achieving the goals of these writing centers. They used place-related terminology in describing writing centers, though 25% of respondents clarified that they did not see writing centers as physical places but more as conversational, knowledge-generating spaces; in other words, they saw them more as moments than as buildings.



Participants' responses emphasized the collaborative process typical of tutoring appointments, the goal of improving writers rather than merely texts through those tutoring appointments, and the student-centered benefits of writing center work. In that same vein, the responses displayed a distinct value for the benefits writing centers could offer to various members of the academic and local communities in which they are located, not just to students, which indicates that respondents place a higher premium on improving human lives than on measurable or abstract benefits. Their responses were also framed to emphasize a strong service focus rather than to make the center appear impressive for its achievements, in most cases. Where the latter appeared, the former was also present, making this conclusion still viable. Only in the final question, in which they were to discuss similarities between Colombian writing centers, did respondents seem to take this more practical and abstract focus rather than the person-centered one that dominated their responses to most other questions.

Synthesizing these results leads to two important conclusions. First, Colombian writing centers do prioritize reading and orality in a way that most US centers do not. Reading is a higher priority for them than oral communication, but both have a strong presence in writing center work in Colombia. More than either of these subjects, however, writing is still the primary function and priority—these are still writing centers, after all—as evidenced by the majority of resources being allocated for it and by the unanimous agreement that individualized writing instruction does more to achieve the goals of a writing center than any other function. This conclusion is consonant with the literature, which has generally not displayed much interest in reading and orality in the writing center (Calle Arango 157-58). Recently, that lack of interest has begun to change, but Calle Arango clarifies that the research on reading is nowhere near enough to balance that on writing and that what interest there has been has usually had a more

practical than theoretical focus (157-58). In light of Calle Arango's observation, it is odd that, participants' responses emphasized reading and orality but did not clarify exactly what they meant by those terms or what those tutoring processes look like in practice. Additional research is needed in these areas but is outside the scope of the present study.

The second conclusion of this study concerns a person-serving approach to writing center work that, while not unique to Colombian writing centers, permeated the responses to this survey (Harris "Collaboration" 272; Powers 374; Lunsford 97). Colombian writing center professionals prioritize people to a greater extent than US centers seem to do. For instance, one respondent described a writing center in the following terms:

Es un espacio de encuentro al rededor [sic] de la lectura, la escritura y/o la oralidad, donde se acompaña a una persona en el descubrir de sus habilidades, se le anima a potencializarlas, donde se le permite conocer y construir sus propias maneras de aprender y de escribir. No es un espacio físico, sino que es el momento en el que el tutor y el tutorado comparten la vida, reflejándose el diálogo en un aprendizaje sobre escritura. [It is a meeting-space around reading, writing, and/or orality, where a person is accompanied in the discovery of his or her abilities, is encouraged to strengthen them, where he or she is permitted to know and build his or her own ways of learning and writing. It is not a physical space but is the moment in which the tutor and the tutee share life, reflecting the dialogue in learning about writing.]

Though much of the content of this response discussed tasks and achievement goals, the respondent tied each element specifically to the person or people involved in or benefitting from it. This definition of a writing center focused on the "encuentro" (meeting) between people before and above the subjects of that meeting or the tasks those people accomplish, defining the

center finally as “el momento en el que el tutor y el tutorado comparten la vida [the moment in which the tutor and the tutee share life].” The diction choices in other responses similarly focused on person-centered benefits, which in one sense is to be expected, since convincing students and faculty to utilize writing services requires convincing them that they, as persons, will benefit. However, this was a response to Question 4, which asked for a definition of a writing center, not to Question 5, which asked for descriptions respondents give to others at their own institutions. Even if respondents were framing their descriptions around persuading people to utilize the center, the inclusion of specifically person-focused language goes beyond that requirement, which could be met by focusing primarily on services and measurable outcomes rather than on human ones. This language instead indicates a shared story of concern for people and interest in finding ways to improve their lives.

Respondents’ descriptions of differences between their writing center and others were more person- and community-oriented than their descriptions of their similarities, which focused more on functions and abstract benefits. For example, one respondent explained the differences between their center and others in the following terms:

Las tutorías: las realizan profesores y estudiantes de maestría vinculados como docentes de los cursos de habilidades comunicativas. Los tutores reciben un reconocimiento monetario por su labor, pero es un servicio gratuito para el usuario. Presta servicio a estudiantes de pregrado y posgrado, docentes, investigadores y empleados de la universidad Ofrece talleres gratuitos para toda la comunidad. [The tutorials: they are carried out by professors and master’s students contracted as teachers of the courses on communication skills. The tutors receive a monetary recognition for their work, but it is a free service for the user. It provides service to undergraduate and graduate students,

teachers, researchers, and university employees[.] It offers free workshops for the whole community.]

This explanation was almost entirely composed of person-centered language. Though the beginning of the response, “Las tutorías:” [The tutorials:], might have led one to expect a dry, skills- or theory-based response, the participant proceeded to discuss the human composition of the tutorial, from the people who conduct them (professors and master’s students) to the financial impact on tutors and users, and then list groups who benefit, up to and including “toda la comunidad” [the whole community]. Ironically, the greatest similarity between respondents—this person-focused approach to writing center work—appeared in the (potentially more abstract) definition question and in the question asking for differences between writing centers, while it was far less prevalent and never explicitly mentioned as a commonality between Colombian writing centers. This absence may indicate a subconscious, automatic focus due to a community-focused orientation of Colombian culture (as noted in respondents’ feedback to Question 6 of the survey—see pages 117-19 in Appendix B for details), but such an argument is outside the scope of this study, since the study focuses on writing centers alone rather than on Colombian cultures. The absence of the person-focused approach from the answers to Question 7, however, does not invalidate its strong presence in the other responses and thus in the story respondents’ answers combined to tell.

### **Comparison with McKinney’s Results**

These conclusions about Colombian writing centers help to illuminate the similarities and differences between Colombian and US writing centers. Though I have not yet answered the first research question of this study, which focused on formulating a Colombian writing center grand narrative, an answer to the second research question will help to clarify the elements involved in

that Colombian writing center grand narrative and so form a bridge from the data to that central conclusion. The second research question asked how the Colombian writing center grand narrative compares to the one McKinney identified in US writing center professionals' descriptions of their work. In comparison with McKinney's conclusion about US centers—*"writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing"* (3)—Colombian writing centers differed in the descriptions that emerged from practitioners' responses. Respondents hardly mentioned the idea of comfort in describing their writing centers or their work. Therefore, while this element may be present, it does not appear to be the important consideration it was in McKinney's study. More significantly, no respondents appeared to focus on the writing center as iconoclastic. While a couple of respondents emphasized writing centers' non-remedial nature, and even the difficulty of communicating this essential aspect of writing center identity and function to others in their institutions, they did not characterize the center as a subversive element allowing students to express themselves in ways not always embraced by the rest of the institution or as a bastion of independent thinking. Neither did they imply that their centers avoid these functions; respondents simply did not address the question, indicating its lower level of relevance to their understanding of their work.

The "all students" piece of McKinney's conclusion is closer to what respondents discussed, but it does not exactly describe participants' responses, either. Rather than focusing on writing centers' relevance to students at every level of writing ability, respondents discussed more consistently and thoroughly the services they offer not only to students but also to faculty and surrounding community members at their institutions. Their answers seemed to indicate that they do help students at every level, but the focus in these responses was more on helping

students wherever they may need help in the writing process, not judging their current level anywhere on a scale but continually seeking to raise it. This portrayal of the students helped in writing centers is consistent with the literature on Colombian writing centers, as the literature similarly seems to focus on improvement rather than students' present difficulties (Muñoz Dagua and Cisneros Estupiñán 84; Calle-Arango "Prácticas" 157; Molina-Natera "Discurso Pedagógico" 126). Moreover, this is a key distinction, since it avoids categorizing tutees according to their current abilities and replaces that view with one primarily focused on progress alone.

As was discussed in analyzing the results for Question 6, the emphasis in these responses is not on placing a responsibility on those in need of tutoring to come ("go") to the center but on the writing center to serve the people in its community. This may seem like a fine distinction, but the attitudes behind these two perceptions of writing center work have significant implications for how writing center professionals view and story themselves and their work. Regardless of people's perceptions of the writing center, the central goal of those who work there is not to isolate or defend themselves—as McKinney's "iconoclastic" element implies in her summary of US writing centers' grand narrative—but to serve, which could result in more collaboration and other methods of engagement with the surrounding communities. Discerning whether that is in fact the case is outside the scope of this study, but it could be an interesting subject for further research.

The one piece of McKinney's grand narrative that appears to apply here without question is the final piece, "to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (3). Respondents unanimously identified individualized writing tutoring as the most essential function of their writing centers,

which agrees with McKinney's portrayal of this individual writing tutoring as the most effective service for people utilizing writing center services.

### **Colombian Writing Center Grand Narrative and Implications**

Based on these considerations and on the data itself, the statement I propose as a grand narrative for Colombian writing centers is as follows: *Un centro de escritura colombiano es un espacio para el fortalecimiento de habilidades y competencias en la lectura y la escritura de los tutorados por el acompañamiento individual de los tutores y para la mejora de la comunidad. (A Colombian writing center is a space for the strengthening of tutees' abilities and competencies in reading and writing through the individual accompaniment of tutors and for the improvement of the community.)* This statement answers the first research question of this study, which asked what grand narrative Colombian writing center professionals imply their adherence to through the ways they describe their work. The wording in this formulation of the grand narrative was drawn entirely from some of the most-used terms in the survey responses. While it may not be the most eloquent rendering of the commonalities between respondents, this formulation does cover the central ideas and includes the implication of service through relationship to give back to the community. Each piece of this statement contains a key feature of the way respondents described their centers and their work within the writing center, so it reflects the story respondents told through their responses.

The components of this statement have been explained in the analysis of respondents' answers to each question and in the summary of results at the beginning of this chapter, but I will review them briefly here. The statement includes the three areas (reading, writing, and oral communication) on which Colombian writing center work focuses. It also defines the center using a term that has place connotations and abstract dimensions to allow for both the majority

and minority descriptions. Another key element it contains is the idea of tutors coming alongside those they tutor to strengthen the tutees' weaknesses and thus improve writers, not merely their writings. Finally, my statement of the grand narrative for Colombian writing centers embraces not only students but also other faculty and community members who utilize writing center services, and it highlights the importance of giving back to a community, which surfaces frequently, both overtly and implicitly, in the survey responses.

This grand narrative statement was produced using McKinney's data analysis methods, but my use of writing center literature in producing it differed from hers. McKinney sought to harmonize her respondents' statements with existing literature in her grand narrative, which led her to include the adjective "comfortable" even though only "a few" of her respondents referenced that concept (63). So, while all the phrases in McKinney's grand narrative appeared in her participants' responses, her grand narrative did not prioritize her respondents' most repeated ideas over common concepts found elsewhere in writing center scholarship (62). In formulating my statement of the grand narrative for Colombian writing centers, I sought to reflect only my participants' ideas, so I used the literature to help me understand my participants' responses rather than as a standard against which to compare them. This differing use of writing center literature contributed to some differences between the grand narratives McKinney and I identified, but the similarities in our approaches still allow for useful comparison between the two.

The third research question from this study asked how US writing centers can learn from the differences between the Colombian writing center grand narrative I have identified and the one McKinney identified for US writing centers. One way US writing centers can learn from Colombian centers, based on the differences in their grand narratives, concerns the Colombian



emphasis on student progress without categorization. It is possible that Colombian writing centers do not feel as great a need as US centers to emphasize that they serve “all students” because going to a writing center is less stigmatized in their communities. However, US writing centers might be able to garner more usage by emphasizing progress and improvement over ability, as Colombian writing centers appear to do. This conclusion requires further research, since it is currently an argument from silence, but if this strategy works, it could help resolve the problem of remediation that has plagued writing centers since their beginnings (North 67).

The final conclusion I have drawn from the results of this study also concerns its applicability to US writing center operation. While US writing centers may not want to offer the more diverse services (i.e., reading and orality) since most institutions have other support programs for those aspects of academic improvement, the attitude the responses to this survey displayed could make writing center work even more rewarding for everyone involved. Making this service- and community-oriented approach a prime priority would help US centers more effectively pursue their stated goals. For instance, US writing center theory for decades discussed centers as “clinics,” which carries a semantic reference to health centers, implying that the mission of the center is to “treat” sick papers and writers (Carino “What Do We Talk About” 33). Many writing center professionals still describe the activities of their centers in similar ways, which seems to imply a somewhat transactional rather than relational interaction. Contemporary US writing centers do maintain a focus on collaboration and emphasize the importance of relational dynamics in tutoring sessions, which brings a relational component into US writing center work as well and has proven both effective and helpful (North 70; Lunsford 92). However, this collaborative emphasis seems to end when the tutoring session does rather than permeating the center’s identity (McKinney 36; Riley 149; Davis 6). This boundary

between the spirit within and outside of tutorials, while not necessarily a problem, can contribute to writing centers appearing more like businesses than community centers.

These two approaches are both compatible with writing center work, but the more community-oriented Colombian attitude, particularly with its emphasis on relationships, is an even more humane model for writing center work than the current US model that includes collaboration only within tutoring sessions. Moreover, while the individualistic approach is certainly valuable and effective, as demonstrated by the success of US writing centers, a more community-oriented approach would fit the subject matter even better. After all, writing is communication, and academic writing in particular constitutes contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

Emphasizing the responsibility members have to that community, then, represents a value that it could benefit US writing centers to more thoroughly adopt and to place at the center of their operations. The simple confidence in responses like this one<sup>2</sup> illustrates the difference that a community-based focus can make to a feeling of belonging: “En el interés que todos tenemos por aportar a la formación y al fortalecimiento de los procesos de lectura y escritura de una comunidad. [In the interest we all have in contributing to the formation and strengthening of the reading and writing processes of a community.]” This response is brief, without a great deal of detail, but its focus on a shared service-based interest and on a shared commitment to community reflects a story of trust and belonging not only within the writing center community but within an institutional one as well.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a response to Question 7, “In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other Colombian writing centers?”

More detailed responses also communicate Colombian writing centers' comfort with their context. For example, one respondent answers the question, "What is a writing center?" in the following terms:

Es un espacio institucional que debe promover una comunidad académica de calidad, esto mediante tutorías personalizadas que coadyuven en el proceso de interpretación y elaboración de textos académicos, además [sic] de acompañar a los docentes en la formulación de propuestas que integren la lectura y la escritura como procesos de aprendizaje en sus áreas y apoyar a colaboradores y egresados en el desarrollo de sus proyectos profesionales. [It is an institutional space that should promote a quality academic community through personalized tutorials that contribute to the process of interpretation and production of academic texts, in addition to accompanying the teachers in the formulation of proposals that integrate reading and writing as learning processes in their areas and support collaborators and graduates in the development of their professional projects.]

This response, too, mentioned community within an academic institution, then proceeded to illustrate how writing centers contribute to and connect within that community. This statement included collaboration with students, teachers, graduates, and others participating in cooperative endeavors—in short, this respondent described a complete academic community and, through the mention of graduates, expanded that community outside the institution to touch the larger world as well. While adopting this viewpoint would not heal all academic divides that cause US writing centers to feel beleaguered and isolated from much of the rest of their institutions (McKinney 36; Riley 149; Davis 6), it could begin to forge more connections between the writing center and its

context, which would help to situate this community-fostering space more firmly within the academic community in which it trains students to participate.

### **Study Limitations**

While this study has generated the conclusions mentioned above, it also includes limitations that could bias the results. One such limitation is the small number of institutions included in the study. I contacted writing center professionals from 12 Colombian institutions of higher education, though my research indicated that the country contains at least 19 college-level writing centers. My methodology, which involved gathering contact information online from writing center websites, resulted in the more limited pool of institutions because several of the writing centers I found in my research were no longer linked at the same web addresses and did not show up in separate searches. Others included no contact information on their websites, so I could not contact them with the others, and the time constraints of the study required me to use electronic communication to complete the study on time.

Another limitation to this study involved the number and affiliations of its participants. Twelve respondents gave me enough data to make an argument with, but by no means enough to state anything conclusively. Moreover, since some institutions included more individual emails on their websites than others did, it is possible that multiple respondents represent the same institution, so the results may reflect even fewer than twelve centers. Others included no contact information on their websites, so I could not contact them via email as I did with the others. I had chosen email as my method of contacting participants before receiving IRB approval, so I used only that communication medium even though it did not allow me to contact all institutions and thus limited my participant pool. The institutions to which participants belong did not include

online writing centers, so this study may not accurately represent the operations and narratives of online writing centers, which do exist in Colombia (Calle Álvarez “Alcance” 137).

Another possible limitation pertains to biasing within the survey itself. Since Question 2 explicitly identified writing, reading, and oral communication as the three areas in which these writing centers should measure their operations, respondents may have thought and responded to later questions more in terms of those three categories than they might have without that initial categorization of their writing centers’ functions. This limitation is a result of the difference between the quantitative questions I used and those in McKinney’s survey, which dealt with respondents’ roles in the writing center, the types of institutions at which they worked, and the mediums they used to describe their writing centers (92-93). This difference likely had a mild impact at most, particularly as respondents moved further into the survey, but the possibility of influence remains and so should not be discounted in considering the data.

This study was also limited by lack of follow-up with respondents. Since respondents were anonymous, I could not ask them to clarify their answers even if I wanted to. This limitation increased the possibility of misunderstanding, which is always a risk in communication but significantly more so when conversation is solely a question and answer with no surrounding dialogue to clarify terms, vague or unclear expressions, and other sources of confusion. I attempted to minimize this risk by modeling this study on McKinney’s successful study, but of course there is always room for error, particularly when participants’ answers can only be communicated to their primary audience through translation.

In addition to these limitations to the survey data, a pervasive limitation to this project involved the relatively small corpus of literature on Colombian writing centers. While many strong sources on the subject exist, Colombian writing centers have been less researched than US

writing centers, so there is less information available about them. This difference in available research materials also contributed to distinctions between McKinney's study and mine, since her conclusions rest on a writing center tradition that has been heavily studied for more than half a century.

### **Further Research**

Future studies will be needed to continue tracing the development of writing centers and their philosophies in Colombia. For example, future research might examine the narratives to which online writing center professionals in Colombia adhere. Such a study could reveal how physical and virtual writing centers in Colombia resemble and differ from one another in their functions and values. Another study like this one—focusing on physical or virtual writing centers, or both—could also be fruitful after writing centers have had another decade to grow and adapt to their contexts, since the differences between US and Colombian writing centers identified in this study could be short-lived experiments or precursors to larger divergences with more dramatic implications for the evolution of writing center work. These implications have a practical dimension, since differing practice can lead to the discovery of even better approaches, as well as a theoretical dimension, since differing practice both reflects and reinforces the beliefs and values on which it is based.

With respect to US writing centers, further research to more fully answer my third research question would increase the usefulness and specificity of the benefits of this study. The question asked, "What can US writing centers learn from these differences [between Colombian and US centers] that will help them more effectively serve their students?" A detailed, nuanced answer that accounts for variations between writing centers, their contexts, and their praxis would make this information both more relevant and more useful to US professionals seeking to

implement such changes. The study aimed for generalized conclusions, so this nuance was outside its scope, but future research could add practical applications to the observations in this study.

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, another question a future study might answer could pertain to whether the current reliance on professors as writing center tutors will continue as it is now, increase, or decrease. Such a study could shed light on how power dynamics and views of academic authority influence writing center work. On a related topic, more research examining differences between adjuncts' and professors' roles in writing center praxis could indicate what impact (if any) their status differences have on their writing center work and on their interactions with students. Pay scale could also be an indicator of status differences like those between adjuncts and tenured professors, so examining differences in pay could also help reveal any impact of academic status on writing center work.

Further research on how Colombian writing centers address reading and orality would contribute to the field by offering a clearer understanding of these centers' practice. Such details were outside the scope of this study, since it examined what writing center professionals *said* they did rather than whether or how those descriptions reflected their praxis. Examining those practical details would provide more insight into the operations and tutoring approaches of Colombian writing centers.

Another study might examine whether the apparently more person- and service-centered attitude displayed here results in more collaboration or other kinds of community engagement. Such research would allow for further comparison with US centers and those in other countries for the betterment of one or both parties. Similarly, a study researching whether or how cultural

values impact how writing centers see themselves could be fruitful in clarifying some of the reasons for similarities and differences between writing centers in various contexts.

Writing center spaces in Colombia could also serve as a fruitful area of future research. Both my results and McKinney's include writing centers' designation as physical spaces, but this aspect of the results was not a central focus of my study. I mentioned respondents' comments on writing centers as spaces because the idea featured prominently in McKinney's analysis and grand narrative statement, but my study did not solicit or generate responses containing detailed information on Colombian writing center spaces. Consequently, this study does not make clear how many of these centers occupy permanently designated spaces and how many might be in more transitory situations, meeting in such spaces as libraries or cafes. Future studies on the kinds of spaces occupied by various Colombian centers could investigate what relationship, if any, exists between a Colombian writing center's physical location and its approaches and attitudes toward writing center work.

As a result of this thesis process, I have gained valuable insights both into my respondents' approaches to writing center work and into my own. The recommendations for growth and learning that I have included in this chapter apply equally to my own writing center and composition teaching work, and I look forward to finding ways to integrate the value for community engagement and contribution that I have gained through the process of this study. The opportunity to look deeper into the development of writing center operations in Colombia after about a decade of growth has been rewarding as well as fascinating, and I hope that this research will encourage current and future writing center practitioners to consider this study's implications for their own center's focus and place in its community. Moreover, regardless of



what future studies choose to focus on, I look forward to seeing how Colombian writing centers and the philosophies surrounding them will continue to develop.

## Appendix A: Survey Results (Spanish)

This section contains the results of the online survey I conducted in February and March 2020. (Analysis of this survey can be found in Chapters 4-5.) I composed questions 1-3, while questions 4-7 were pulled from the study by Jackie Grutsch McKinney on which this survey is based (62). Twelve respondents participated in the survey, and their responses have not been modified or corrected except to remove identifying information.

### **Question 1—¿Quién da las tutorías en su centro de escritura? (Por favor seleccione todas las que apliquen)**

Estudiantes de pregrado: 8 (de los 12 encuestados)

Estudiantes de posgrado: 1

Miembros de facultad: 6

Otro (por favor especifique): 3

#### Otro (por favor especifique) Respuestas:

- Profesores de los cursos con vinculación por horas a la universidad
- Profesores
- Hay dos tipos de tutores: profesor de lengua y estudiantes de diferentes carreras con aptitudes [sic] y competencias en lectura y escritura.

### **Question 2—¿Cuáles de los siguientes servicios ofrece su centro? (Por favor seleccione todas las que apliquen)**

Tutorías personalizadas: 11

Enseñanza de escritura en grupo: 11

Curso(s) de escritura: 8

Folletos de estrategias de escritura (gramática, etc.):	5
Enseñanzas de lectura individual	7
Enseñanza de lectura en grupo	9
Curso(s) de lectura	5
Folletos de estrategias de lectura (identificación de temas, etc.)	4
Enseñanza individual en comunicación verbal	7
Enseñanza en grupo en comunicación verbal	7
Curso(s) en comunicación verbal	4
Folletos de estrategias de comunicación verbal (atención de público, etc.)	3
Tutorías virtuales	10
Talleres dirigidos por docentes	8
Servicios de tutorías para docentes	10
Presentaciones en clase sobre los servicios del centro de escritura	10
Presentaciones en clase sobre aspectos y detalles de la escritura	11
Presentaciones en clase sobre los aspectos y detalles de la lectura	10
Presentaciones en clase sobre los aspectos y detalles de la comunicación verbal	8
Otro (por favor especifique)	5

Otro (por favor especifique) Respuestas:

- Participación en actividades extra curriculares: concurso de ortografía, jornadas para bachilleres
- Trabajo entre profesores de lengua y de las disciplinas para explicar géneros discursivos propios de las profesiones.

- Talleres dirigidos por tutores solicitadas por docente en asignaturas de todas las carreras.  
Recursos con ayudas sobre escritura  
Enseñanza de Normas Internacionales
- Acompañamiento en el proceso de escritura de estudiantes de intercambio
- Servicios de tutorías para trabajadores de la universidad y para la comunidad en general.

**Question 3—¿De los servicios mencionados previamente, ¿cuál considera que es el más importante para llevar a cabo la misión de su centro? ¿Por qué?**

Tutorías individuales a estudiantes y profesores por su carácter personalizado que favorece la detección y solución de problemas lecto-escritura

A todos los aspectos damos relevancia, pero se enfoca principalmente en tutorías personalizadas de escritura.

Las tutorías personalizadas, pues atender a los estudiantes, colaboradores o externos; conocer las necesidades particulares y brindar apoyo, es la razón de ser del centro.

Tutorías personalizadas porque es lo que los estudiantes solicitan en mayor medida. Adicionalmente, es una manera en que los estudiantes pueden resolver dudas sobre temas específicos pero también hay oportunidad de generar aprendizaje sobre otros temas que favorecen principalmente a la escritura, como también a la lectura u oralidad.

Las tutorías personalizadas y en grupo, porque con estas los estudiantes pueden trabajar, de forma personalizada, áreas de la escritura que se les dificulta. De esta manera, ya sea individual o en grupo, el tutorado puede identificar posibles formas de mejorar su texto, lo que implica una mejora en sus habilidades de escritura. Cuando la tutoría es en grupo, entre todos se

puede construir un diálogo alrededor del texto que posibilita la metacognición y el aprendizaje de la escritura.

Las tutorías personalizadas. Trabajar exclusivamente con una persona y dedicársele a ella optimiza el tiempo y los esfuerzos; además, hay que tener en cuenta que las demandas puedes [sic] ser muy diferentes de un sujeto a otro.

Tutorías individuales, ya que de esta forma los tutores podemos acercarnos directamente al estudiante y enfocarnos en sus debilidades particulares en el campo de la escritura y la lectura.

Acompañamiento en el proceso de escritura, pues este implicaba partir desde estrategias de lectura hasta llegar a la producción de textos académicos

Tutorías a estudiantes y profesores porque se ocupa de la lectura, escritura y oralidad en la columna vertebral de la educación.

Las tutorías presenciales son la esencia del centro de escritura de una Universidad. Mediante estas se gestan procesos de aprendizaje colaborativo entre pares.

Tutorías personalizadas [sic], debido a que se puede ayudar al estudiante de manera clara y concisa, el se presenta con falencias y se puede trabajar personalmente a diferencia de un grupo de trabajo

Tutorías personalizadas. Porque nos permite tener un contacto directo e individual con la persona que asiste al centro, lo que nos permite brindarle un acompañamiento que vaya acorde con sus necesidades. Se posibilita un espacio de encuentro y se utiliza un texto como excusa para descubrir o potencializar las habilidades que tiene la persona; resulta la escritura un pretexto para compartir la vida y construir con otro el saber.

**Question 4—¿En sus propias palabras, ¿qué es un centro de escritura?**

Es una unidad académica cuyo objetivo es apoyar los procesos pedagógicos y didácticos de los estudiantes, profesores y empleados de la Universidad. Al estar dirigido a los procesos de lectura, escritura y comunicación favorece la permanencia de los estudiantes en la universidad y, al tiempo, genera nuevas didácticas para el desarrollo de dichas competencias.

Es un espacio institucional que debe promover una comunidad académica de calidad, esto mediante tutorías personalizadas que coadyuven en el proceso de interpretación y elaboración de textos académicos, además [sic] de acompañar a los docentes en la formulación de propuestas que integren la lectura y la escritura como procesos de aprendizaje en sus áreas y apoyar a colaboradores y egresados en el desarrollo de sus proyectos profesionales.

Un centro de escritura es un espacio que sirve de apoyo para fortalecer los procesos de lectura y escritura de una comunidad.

Un Centro de Escritura es un espacio no físico donde se genera una dinámica de aprendizaje bidireccional en un ambiente de confianza entre un tutorado y un tutor, en el que ambos generan esos aprendizajes en torno a un diálogo generado al rededor de un texto.

Es un lugar que se dedica a mejorar las habilidades de escritura de las personas, por medio de la revisión y el diálogo alrededor de un texto o por medio de la planeación del mismo.

Un centro de escritura es un espacio creado para que una comunidad pueda fortalecer su competencia escrita (pero también lectora y oral). Un centro de escritura no es un espacio

remedial o asistencialista<sup>3</sup>; su objetivo debe ser empoderar al tutorado para que llegue el día en el que no necesite asistir.

Un centro de escritura es un espacio donde un estudiante con habilidades en el ámbito de la escritura le ofrece un acompañamiento a otro para ayudarlo a mejorar sus destrezas. El objetivo principal de los centros de escritura es generar autonomía de los mismos, es decir, que el estudiante llegue a un punto donde no lo necesite más.

Un centro que permite el fortalecimiento de habilidades relacionadas con los procesos de escritura como lectura, interpretación, identificación de tipos de texto, etc.

Es un programa que se propone acompañar las prácticas de lectura, escritura y oralidad para mejorar la educación.

Es el espacio de aprendizaje entre pares que delinea la escritura como proceso y no solo como producto. Cabe aclarar que el centro de escritura no tiene como fin la corrección [sic] de estilo sino por el contrario está diseñado para impulsar las fortalezas y el potencial de los autores en sus producciones escritas.

Un Centro de Escritura es un lugar para el fortalecimiento de las habilidades de LEctura, escritura y oralidad. Es un sitio en el cual la comunidad academica puede aclarar y reforzas los conocimientos en escritura, redacción, puntuación, oralidad, etc.

Es un espacio de encuentro al rededor de la lectura, la escritura y/o la oralidad, donde se acompaña a una persona en el descubrir de sus habilidades, se le anima a potencializarlas, donde se le permite conocer y construir sus propias maneras de aprender y de escribir. No es un espacio

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<sup>3</sup> As I explain at greater length in footnote 2 of Chapter 4, “asistencialista” has no exact English equivalent. The word refers to an approach to fixing a (usually political or social) problem by addressing the surface issues but neglecting the underlying problems.

físico, sino que es el momento en el que el tutor y el tutorado comparten la vida, reflejándose el diálogo en un aprendizaje sobre escritura.

**Question 5—¿Cómo describe la labor de su centro de escritura a las personas de su institución académica?**

Al momento de su configuración determinamos la siguiente misión, con la cual nos presentamos ante la comunidad: Contribuir al fortalecimiento de las competencias de lectura y escritura de los estudiantes, profesores y empleados de la Universidad y de la comunidad académica y empresarial, a través del diseño y desarrollo de programas, talleres, investigaciones, asesoría y consultoría en dichas competencias, con el fin de potenciar sus habilidades en la comprensión, estructuración y comunicación de textos.

El centro de escritura es un espacio de investigación que permite la generación de conocimiento, además de ser el escenario adecuado no solo para el apoyo de prácticas de lectura y escritura en la universidad, sino también para la investigación sobre esta área de conocimiento.

Excelente! El centro de escritura de la universidad en la que trabajo es considerado como un pilar muy importante en la formación integral de los estudiantes, teniendo en cuenta que el aprendizaje disciplinar no es suficiente para la formación de un profesional.

Es una labor necesaria y de gran ayuda para todos los asistentes al Centro. La oportunidad de contar con personas que cuenten con las habilidades para ayudar a otro en procesos de escritura, oralidad o lectura es gratificante y se ve reflejado en los aprendizajes que los tutorados generan en las sesiones o durante las diferentes actividades que el Centro realiza.



Yo siempre explico que brindamos un acompañamiento en la escritura, desde el momento de la planeación del texto, la elaboración de borradores y las constantes revisiones del texto. Todo esto con el fin de mejorar las habilidades de escritura y no solo el texto en sí mismo.

En el centro de escritura del cual hago parte nuestra labor como tutores trata de ser un reflejo de lo expuesto en la pregunta anterior; no obstante, en la mayoría de los casos, las consultas terminan siendo remediales, para corregir la tarea, y no para aprender a escribir o a pensar mejor.

Mi labor como tutora en el centro de escritura es servir de apoyo en las diferentes etapas del proceso de escritura de los demás estudiantes.

Los estudiantes que tomaban varias tutorías a lo largo del semestre reconocían el avance en su proceso.

Es ágil, porque las citas se pueden conseguir rápidamente; es integral, porque se ocupa de las prácticas de lectura, escritura y oralidad en cualquier género textual; es interactiva, porque se fundamenta en la interacción para la construcción de conocimiento; es formativa, porque ayuda a transformar las prácticas de lectura, escritura y oralidad.

Es una labor en aras del aprendizaje. El objetivo de esta es dar inicio y continuidad a lo [sic] procesos de aprendizaje de escritura académica.

Es una labor de guía y aprendizaje mutuo, debido a que es un proceso en el cual servimos como instrumento para los estudiantes/ docentes, ayudando a fortalecer las falencias que tengan en lectura y escritura, además, como todo proceso académico el aprendizaje es mutuo.

Es el espacio de acompañar a la comunidad educativa en sus procesos de escritura, en especial a los estudiantes de pregrado, quienes llegan con grandes miedos al enfrentarse a textos académicos y de mayor exigencia, por lo que el centro se vuelve un espacio de tranquilidad,

donde descubren que no se trata de si es fácil o difícil, sino que es importante conocer la manera que tiene cada uno de escribir, y que a su manera, es capaz de hacerlo.

**Question 6—¿En qué maneras cree que su centro de escritura es distinto a otros centros de escritura en Colombia?**

Las tutorías: las realizan profesores y estudiantes de maestría vinculados como docentes de los cursos de habilidades comunicativas. Los tutores reciben un reconocimiento monetario por su labor, pero es un servicio gratuito para el usuario. Presta servicio a estudiantes de pregrado y posgrado, docentes, investigadores y empleados de la universidad Ofrece talleres gratuitos para toda la comunidad

Cada comunidad académica tiene sus particularidades, por lo tanto, nuestro centro de escritura se diferencia en la medida de los requerimientos que la misma comunidad considere pertinentes. Sin embargo, consideramos que el pensarnos la lectura y la escritura como PRÁCTICAS necesarias para participación social.

Una de las diferencias es que en nuestro centro tenemos tanto tutores estudiantes como tutores docentes, lo que no es común en los otros centros del país, ya que el servicio por lo general lo prestan solo tutores estudiantes.

El Centro de Escritura [REDACTED] se preocupa mucho por la preparación de sus tutores, por eso es requisito hacer un curso de 6 meses donde no se enseña a escribir, sino que se proporcionan las bases de cómo es el papel de un tutor y se brindan estrategias que favorezcan a la formación de estos. Adicionalmente, los tutores del Centro somos todos estudiantes de Pregrado, lo cual es un factor diferenciador pues, a comparación de otros Centros, no contamos con tutores con niveles mayores de estudios pues consideramos que los estudiantes de pregrado

tenemos todas las condiciones para ser tutores y por eso el curso busca potencializar estas habilidades, a fin de sacar lo mejor de cada tutor.

Creo que es diferente porque nos enfocamos en el tutorado y en que este de verdad aprenda algo en el espacio de la tutoría.

En el Centro de Lectura y Escritura de la Universidad [REDACTED] (Colombia) contamos con tutores profesores y tutores estudiantes; además, los tutores estudiantes forman parte de un sistema académico de formación permanente, propiciado por el mismo centro a través de los profesores.

El centro de escritura [REDACTED] es el primero que fue creado en la ciudad de Cali, por tanto, este sirvió como base para que se desarrollaran espacios similares en todo el país. Aquí, se ofrecen distintos tipos de servicios que son flexibles y se adaptan a las diferentes necesidades que se van creando dentro del campus universitario.

El proceso no se trata solo de una tutoría al semestre, sino de un acompañamiento, de modo que el estudiante fuera el mismo el que al final siguiera todos los pasos recomendados: Lectura cuidadosa, toma de ideas [sic], planeación, escritura de un borrador, revisión.

En el tipo de asesorías que se brindan a los profesores.

Es un centro dinámico que se preocupa por las necesidades de aprendizaje reales de los estudiantes que se enfrentan a la lectura y escritura académica universitaria. No es un servicio de corrección [sic] de estilo, es un espacio que espera potencializar y brindar seguridad al estudiante cuando se enfrenta a escribir textos de más rigor académico. Es un espacio también que se interesa por conocer un poco más de los estudiantes que nos visitan.

El centro de escritura [REDACTED], se enfoca en manejar diferentes ámbitos de estudio, además de la escritura, la lectura estamos fortaleciendo el proceso de la oralidad. De igual forma

nos enfatizamos en los procesos de investigación, apoyando a la comunidad con sus investigaciones y dudas respecto a ellas, estamos en constante evolución.

El Centro de Escritura [REDACTED] se ve permeado por la filosofía institucional, por lo que, bajo los principios ignacianos, comprende que más allá de acompañar los procesos de escritura, se acompaña la construcción del ser. Es por esto que, bajo la premisa del Magis “Ser más para servir mejor”, nos encontramos, como tutores, en contante [sic] formación, para que tanto nosotros, como todas las personas que pasen por el centro, podamos ser mejores y poner nuestras experiencias al servicio de la comunidad.

**Question 7—¿En qué maneras cree que su centro de escritura es similar a otros centros de escritura en Colombia?**

En su función de fortalecimiento de las habilidades y competencias de lectura, escritura y oralidad. En el desarrollo de investigaciones En la capacitación constante de docentes y tutores En su naturaleza de unidad académica de apoyo

Colombia es un país que tiene unas particularidades en enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura, por lo tanto muchos de los estudiantes universitarios presentan las mismas deficiencias en estos procesos, entre ellas asuntos de tipo gramatical que siguen preocupando no solo a los profesores sino también a los estudiantes y futuros profesionales.

En el interés que todos tenemos por aportar a la formación y al fortalecimiento de los procesos de lectura y escritura de una comunidad.

La relación entre pares es uno de los factores que generan ese lazo de similitud entre todos los Centros. Esto precisa también que la metodología del Centro sigue los estándares de los

Centros de Escritura en general donde, por medio de preguntas y un acompañamiento no directivo, se logra guiar a los tutorados con lo propuesto.

Al igual que los demás centros, nos enfocamos en las habilidades de escritura, la revisión de textos y la posibilidad de mejorarlo durante la tutoría.

Nos parecemos en que todos quisiéramos no ser remediales, pero que las demandas -en la mayoría de los casos, insisto- hace que nos concentremos en lo inmediato y no en lo importante.

El centro de escritura [REDACTED] ofrece el servicio de tutorías individuales, el cual es el fundamento básico de todos los centros del país. Por otra parte, somos los estudiantes quienes dirigimos las tutorías, patrón que se repite en la mayoría de los centros

En elegir y formar a estudiantes como tutores

En el tipo de asesorías que se ofrecen a estudiantes.

Es similar en tanto varios centros de desarrollan en un contexto universitario de pregrado.

En Colombia, y en general en todos los Centros de Escritura, al igual que el nuestro, se realizan asesorías personalizadas al estudiante/docente, para tratar de fortalecer sus falencias académicas.

En los servicios que se prestan y en el objetivo común que tienen los centros de escritura, en especial en cuanto al andamiaje y estrategias de acompañamiento.

## Appendix B: Survey Responses (English Translation)

This section contains the results of the online survey I conducted in February and March 2020. (Analysis of this survey can be found in Chapters 4-5.) I composed questions 1-3, while questions 4-7 were pulled from the study by Jackie Grutsch McKinney on which this survey is based (62). Twelve respondents participated in the survey, and their responses have not been modified or corrected except to remove identifying information and translate the responses from Spanish to English.

### **Question 1—Who tutors students in your writing center? (Please select all that apply)**

Undergraduate students:	8 (of the 12 respondents)
Graduate students:	1
Faculty members:	6
Other (please specify):	3

#### Other (please specify) Responses:

- Professors of courses with contracted hours to the university
- Professors
- There are two types of tutors: language professor[s] and students of different degrees with abilities and competencies in reading and writing.

### **Question 2—Which of the following services does your center offer? (Please select all that apply)**

One-to-one writing tutoring	11
Group writing instruction	11
A writing course (or courses)	8

Pamphlets on writing strategies (grammar, etc.)	5
Individual reading instruction	7
Group reading instruction	9
A reading course (or courses)	5
Pamphlets on reading strategies (identifying themes, etc.)	4
Individual instruction in oral communication	7
Group instruction in oral communication	7
An oral communication course (or courses)	4
Pamphlets on oral communication strategies (audience engagement, etc.)	3
Online tutoring	10
Faculty workshops	8
Tutoring services for faculty	10
Classroom presentations on aspects or details of writing center services	10
Classroom presentations on aspects or details of writing	11
Classroom presentations on aspects or details of reading	10
Classroom presentations on aspects or details of oral communication	8
Other (please specify)	5

Other (please specify) Responses:

- Participation in extracurricular activities: spelling bees, workshops for high school students

- Work between language professors and professors of the disciplines to explain discursive genres<sup>4</sup> specific to the professions.
- Workshops directed by tutors requested by a teacher in subjects from all majors.

Resources with writing help

Teaching international standards

- Accompaniment in the writing process for exchange students
- Tutorial services for university workers and for the community in general.

**Question 3—Of the services listed above, which do you consider to be most essential to carrying out the mission of your center? Why?**

Individual tutorials for students and professors because of their personalized nature, which facilitates the detection and solution of reading and writing problems

All aspects are relevant, but it [the writing center] focuses primarily on personalized writing tutorials.

Personalized tutorials, because to assist students, collaborators, or outsiders; to know their particular needs; and to offer support, is the reason for the center's existence.

Personalized tutorials because that is what students request to the greatest extent. Additionally, it is a way in which students can resolve their doubts about specific issues, but

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<sup>4</sup> For a case study explaining and applying the concept of discursive genre, see Camilla Buzzi's "The Human Rights Report as Discursive Genre: Evolving Discourses in Human Rights Activism in Myanmar/Burma, 1988-2011."



there is also an opportunity to generate learning about other topics that primarily favor writing, but also reading and orality.<sup>5</sup>

Personalized and group tutorials, because with these the students can work, in a personalized manner, on writing areas that are difficult for them. In this way, whether individual or in a group, the tutee can identify possible ways to improve the student's text, which involves an improvement in his or her writing abilities. When the tutorial is in a group, a dialogue of the text can be constructed between all group members, allowing for metacognition and learning about writing.

Personalized tutorials. Working exclusively with one person and focusing on [him or] her optimizes time and efforts; also, one should consider that the demands can be very different from one subject to another.

Individual tutorials, because in this way we tutors can directly approach the student and focus on his or her particular weaknesses in the field of writing and reading.

Accompaniment in the writing process, since this started with reading strategies and developed into the production of academic texts.

Tutorials for students and professors because they deal with reading, writing, and orality as the backbone of education.

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of orality includes several aspects of individual and cultural speech acts, but most of writing center literature seems to treat orality as a common academic function, much like reading or writing, and so focuses on the practical applications for speech (Lochman 19). For an interdisciplinary discussion of orality that centers on a Colombian creole language, see *Orality, Identity, and Resistance in Palenque (Colombia): An Interdisciplinary Approach* by Armin Schwegler et al. For a focused exploration of the linguistic dimension of orality, see Carolina P. Amador-Moreno's *Orality in Written Texts: Using Historical Corpora to Investigate Irish English 1700-1900*. The study of orality as referencing oral cultures in contrast to literate cultures seems less relevant here, but a helpful exploration of that dimension of orality appears in *Orality and Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines* by Keith Thor Carlson et al.

On-site tutorials are the essence of a University writing center. Through these[,] collaborative learning processes are generated between pairs.

Personalized tutorials, because the student can be helped in a clear and concise manner; the student shows up with weaknesses[,] and we can deal with him personally, unlike in a group setting.

Personalized tutorials. Because it permits us to have direct and individual contact with the person that attends the center, which allows us to provide them an accompaniment that goes along with their needs. A meeting space is provided and a text is used as an excuse to discover or strengthen the skills the person has; writing becomes a pretext for sharing life and constructing knowledge with others.

#### **Question 4—In your own words, what is a writing center?**

It is an academic unit whose objective is to support the pedagogical and didactic processes of the students, professors, and employees of the University. With a focus on reading, writing, and communication processes, it promotes student retention in the university and, at the same time, generates new didactics for the development of said competencies.

It is an institutional space that should promote a quality academic community through personalized tutorials that contribute to the process of interpretation and production of academic texts, in addition to accompanying the teachers in the formulation of proposals that integrate reading and writing as learning processes in their areas and supporting collaborators and graduates in the development of their professional projects.

A writing center is a space that serves as support to strengthen a community's reading and writing processes.

A Writing Center is a non-physical space where a bidirectional learning dynamic is generated in an environment of trust between a tutee and a tutor, in which both generate their learning from a dialogue generated around a text.

It is a place that is dedicated to improving people's writing skills through revision and dialogue around a text or through the creation of it.

A writing center is a space created so that a community can strengthen its writing competency (but also reading and orality). A writing center is not a remedial or stopgap<sup>6</sup> space; its objective should be to empower the tutee so that the day comes when [he or she] does not need to attend.

A writing center is a space where a student with skills in the area of writing offers an accompaniment to another [student] to help improve his or her skills. The principal objective of writing centers is to generate student autonomy, that is, that the student gets to a point where he or she does not need it anymore.

A center that allows the strengthening of skills related to writing processes like reading, interpretation, identification of types of text, etc.

It is a program that is proposed to accompany reading, writing, and orality practices to improve education.

It is the space for learning between pairs that delineates writing as a process and not just as a product. It is worth clarifying that the writing center's end goal is not to correct the style, but

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<sup>6</sup> As I explain at greater length in footnote 2 of Chapter 4, "asistencialista" has no exact English equivalent. The word refers to an approach to fixing a (usually political or social) problem by addressing the surface issues but neglecting the underlying problems.

on the contrary it is designed to boost the strengths and the potential of the authors in their written productions.

A Writing Center is a place for the strengthening of reading, writing, and orality skills. It is a place in which the academic community can clarify and reinforce knowledge in writing, editing, punctuation, orality, etc.

It is a meeting-space that revolves around reading, writing, and/or orality, where a person is accompanied in the discovery of his or her abilities, is encouraged to strengthen them, where he or she is permitted to know and build his or her own ways of learning and writing. It is not a physical space, but it is the moment in which the tutor and the tutee share life, reflecting the dialogue in learning about writing.

**Question 5—How do you describe the role of your writing center to others at your own school?**

At the moment of its configuration we determined the following mission, which we presented before the community: To contribute to the strengthening of reading and writing competencies of the students, professors, and employees of the University and of the academic and corporate community, through the design and development of programs, workshops, research, mentoring, and consulting in different competencies, with the goal of enhancing their skills in the comprehension, structuring, and communication of texts.

The writing center is a research space that allows the formation of knowledge, in addition to being the appropriate setting not only for the support of reading and writing practices in the university, but also for research about this area of knowledge.

Excellent! The university writing center in which I work is considered a very important pillar in students' integral formation, taking into account that disciplinary knowledge is not sufficient for the training of a professional.

It is a necessary work and of great help for all attendees to the Center. The opportunity to count on people who have the skills to help others in writing, orality, or reading processes is gratifying and is reflected in the learning that the tutees generate in the sessions or during the different activities that the Center carries out.

I always explain that we offer an accompaniment in writing from the moment of planning the text, the elaboration of drafts[,] and the constant revisions of the text. All this in order to improve writing skills and not just the text itself.

In the writing center that I am part of, our job as tutors tries to be a reflection of what was stated in the previous question; notwithstanding, in the majority of cases, consultations end up being remedial, to correct homework and not to learn [how] to write or think better.

My job as a tutor in the writing center is to serve as support in the different stages of the writing process of other students.

The students that have several tutorials throughout the semester recognize the improvement in their process.

It is expeditious, because the appointments can be scheduled quickly; it is comprehensive, because it deals with reading, writing, and orality practices in any kind of text; it is interactive, because it is based on interaction for the construction of knowledge; it is formative, because it helps transform reading, writing, and orality practices.

It is work for the sake of learning. The objective of this is to begin and give continuity to the processes of learning about academic writing.

It is a work of mutual guidance and learning, inasmuch as it is a process in which we serve as an instrument for the students/teachers, helping to improve the weaknesses that they have in reading and writing; also, as in every academic process, the learning is mutual.

It is the space for accompanying the educational community in their writing processes, especially undergraduate students, who come with great fears to face academic and more demanding texts, for which the center becomes a place of tranquility, where they discover that it does not matter if it is easy or difficult, but that it is important to know the way each one writes, and that whatever their method, they are able to do it.

**Question 6—In what ways do you think your writing center is different from other Colombian writing centers?**

The tutorials: they are carried out by professors and master's students contracted as teachers of communication skills courses. The tutors receive a monetary recognition for their work, but it is a free service for the user. It provides service to undergraduate and graduate students, teachers, researchers, and university employees[.] It offers free workshops for the whole community.

Each academic community has its particularities; therefore, our writing center differs according to the requirements that our community considers pertinent. However, we consider thinking about reading and writing as necessary PRACTICES for social participation.

One of the differences is that in our center we have both student tutors and teacher tutors, which is not common in other centers in the country, since in general only student tutors provide the service.

The [redacted] Writing Center cares a lot about its tutors' preparation; therefore, [they] are require[d] to do a 6-month course where they are not taught to write but are provided [with] the foundations of the role of a tutor and given strategies that encourage their formation. Additionally, the Center's tutors are all undergraduate students, which is a differentiating factor because, in comparison with other centers, we do not have tutors with higher levels of study because we consider that undergraduate students have all the qualifications to be tutors and therefore the course seeks to strengthen these skills in order to bring out the best from each tutor.

I believe that it is different because we focus on the tutee and on what this tutee really learns in the tutorial space.

In the Reading and Writing Center of the [redacted] University (Colombia) we count on professor and student tutors; also, the student tutors form part of a permanent academic system of formation, fostered by the same center through the professors.

The [redacted] writing center is the first one created in the city of Cali; thus, this served as a basis so that similar spaces [could] be developed in the whole country. Here, distinct types of services are offered that are flexible and adapt to the different needs that are being created within the university campus.

The process is not a matter of just one tutorial per semester, but an accompaniment, so that by the end the student will follow all the recommended steps: careful reading, idea taking, planning, writing from a draft, revision.

In the type of consultations that are offered to the professors.

It is a dynamic center that is concerned with the real learning needs of students who face university academic reading and writing. It is not a style-editing service; it is a space that hopes to strengthen and provide security to the student when faced with writing texts of greater

academic rigor. It is also a space that is interested in knowing a little more about the students that visit us.

The [REDACTED] writing center is focused on handling different fields of study; in addition to writing [and] reading[,] we are strengthening the process of orality. In the same way we emphasize the processes of research, supporting the community with their research and questions about it; we are in constant development.

The [REDACTED] Writing Center appears permeated by institutional philosophy, for which reason, under Ignatian principles, it understands that, beyond accompanying writing processes, it accompanies the construction of the being. It is for this reason that, under the premise of Magis to “become more to serve better,” we find ourselves as tutors in constant formation, so that we, as much as all the people that pass through the center, may be better and put our experience to the service of the community.

**Question 7—In what ways do you think your writing center is similar to other Colombian writing centers?**

In its function of strengthening abilities and competencies in reading, writing, and orality. In the development of research[.] In the constant training of teachers and tutors[.] In its nature as an academic support unit[.]

Colombia is a country that has some particularities in teaching reading and writing; therefore, many university students present the same weaknesses in these processes, among them grammatical issues that continue to worry not only professors but also students and future professionals.



In the interest we all have in contributing to the formation and strengthening of the reading and writing processes of a community.

The relationship between pairs is one of the factors that generates that link of similarity between all the Centers. This also indicates that the methodology of the Center follows the standards of Writing Centers in general where, through questions and a non-directive accompaniment, it is possible to guide the tutees with what is proposed.

Just like the other centers, we focus on writing skills, text revisions, and the possibility of improving texts during the tutorial.

We look alike in that we all seek to not be remedial, but the demands—in the majority of cases, I insist—make us concentrate on the immediate and not on what is important.

The [REDACTED] writing center offers the individual tutorials service, which is the basic foundation of all the centers in the country. On the other hand, we are the students who lead the tutorials, a pattern that repeats itself in the majority of centers.

In choosing and training students as tutors

In the type of assistance that we offer students.

It is similar as various centers develop in an undergraduate university context.

In Colombia, and in general in all Writing Centers, just like ours, personalized services are performed for student[s]/teacher[s] to try to strengthen their academic weaknesses.

In the services that they offer and in the common objective that the writing centers have, especially in terms of framework and accompaniment strategies.

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