

From the Editors

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In this issue, our second one as co-editors of *SDC*, we offer a retrospective on the most recent SWCA Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC, held in February of 2019. The theme of that meeting was “The Ongoing Conversation,” a phrase which of course refers to threads in discussions—both formal and informal—about writing centers and writing center work that began decades ago and will likely continue for years to come.

This issue features two addresses from the conference and one article that grew from a presentation at the conference. There were numerous excellent presentations in Myrtle Beach, many of which could have been worked into excellent contributions to this issue. We would like to have presented even more of that fine work here, but the gears of the scholarly writing, review, and publication process do seem to turn rather slowly sometimes. We hope to be able to publish additional articles from 2019 SWCA attendees in a future issue, but we are extremely pleased to be able to feature here several pieces that capture much of the spirit of a vibrant and productive conference.

The two addresses presented here offer an excellent overview of several “ongoing conversations” that are central to the work we do as writing center practitioners and scholars.

Isabelle Thompson’s keynote address traces trends in writing center research over several decades and demonstrates both the value and the difficulty of conducting true RAD (replicable, aggregable, and data-supported) or empirical research. This address also focuses on the quantitative/qualitative continuum and argues that “we need to get beyond the local level in our empirical investigations.”

Jo Mackiewicz’s plenary address provides a clear blueprint for conducting the kind of quantitative research that Thompson advocates for. Her call for better research on revision processes and on the effect of writing centers on students’ revision skills shows how something that seems inherently qualitative in nature can be approached in an empirical way. Mackiewicz admits that such research is difficult, but concludes that the “return on investment is worthwhile—both in terms about what we learn about the writing center’s contribution to writers’ gains and in terms of the writing center’s ability to provide evidence of those contributions.”

The article by Eliot Rendleman, Judith Livingston, and Sundi Rose contributes to an ongoing debate that may be one of the most contentious issues in writing center practice: the advisability and value of mandatory appointments for students. Required appointments are often thought to be counterproductive. This study, however, explains why Rendleman abandoned his “long-held resistance to mandatory visits” and provides empirical data supporting “a system of mandatory visits that ensures students visit the writing center at least three times.” With any luck, this recommendation will provoke responses from fellow writing center practitioners on this crucial and much-debated question.

Lisa Marzano’s profile of the Center for Writing Excellence at Palm Beach Atlantic University introduces readers to a writing center where students receive assistance from tutors who have been through a rigorous and well-coordinated multi-part training program that requires tutors to attend multiple training “classes” every semester. Marzano paints a picture of a center in which everyone on the staff is committed to serving the needs of both faculty and students.

Graham Stowe’s review of Rebecca Greenfield’s *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Engagement* describes the book as a thoughtful attempt to focus on big-picture questions of ethics, politics, and justice as those issues connect to the work we do in writing centers. Stowe says Greenfield rejects both the “conservative” and the “liberal” approach to the ethics of writing center practice and instead “asks for nothing less than to redefine the field of writing center studies altogether.”

While this issue contains only five total pieces, we are pleased first of all with the overall quality of all of those pieces and, perhaps more importantly, with the way they work together to present a picture of writing center scholarship and practice as an evolving response to some of the most important ongoing conversations and debates in our field: qualitative vs. quantitative, stories vs. numbers, conservative vs. liberal vs. radical, HOCs vs. LOCs, mandatory vs. self-directed. If this issue helps readers engage with and enter into these important continuing discussions, we feel that all of the collective effort that goes into producing this publication will be worthwhile indeed.

As always, we want to encourage readers to become involved in the journal by joining the list of reviewers or submitting a manuscript for publication. On the final page of this issue, you will find a call for submissions, but if you have any questions about the journal, please feel free to contact either of us at any time. We may not always have an immediate or definitive answer to your question, but we're always eager to hear from readers who have thoughts or questions about the journal.

Thank you for supporting the work of the SWCA organization in general and this journal specifically.

--Scott and Devon