



Making a Connection

Studying the Uses of Needs Analysis in
Asynchronous Writing Tutoring

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Making a Connection: Studying the Uses of Needs Analysis in Asynchronous Writing Tutoring

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Abstract

A gap in the literature indicates that needs analysis and writing centres have yet to be explicitly studied side-by-side. This dissertation's original contributions to knowledge are: an investigation of how needs analysis is currently being used in asynchronous online writing centres; and a model that writing centres can use to focus their needs analysis efforts. A questionnaire was created with the help of an informant, a seasoned writing centre director whose centre provides asynchronous tutoring, then emailed to an open mailing list for North American writing centre professionals. The questionnaire was primarily developed to ask participants about the way their centre: conducts asynchronous work, reports on sessions, and trains tutors. A discussion of the results suggests that there are various ways that writing centres are conducting needs analysis. In an attempt to organise a model that can be used for improving needs analysis efforts, this dissertation concludes that writing centres can benefit by: (1) using custom online asynchronous platforms; (2) collecting more and varied information; (3) using reports educationally; and (4) effectively training and positioning tutors to conduct needs analysis.

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Author's Declaration

Declaration

Plagiarism Extract from the University Calendar, Volume I, General Regulations VIII

'In formal examinations and all assessed work prescribed in degree, diploma and certificate regulations, candidates should take care to acknowledge the work and opinions of others and avoid any appearance of representing them as their own. Unacknowledged quotation or close paraphrasing of other people's writing, amounting to the presentation of other persons' thoughts or writings as one's own, is plagiarism and will be penalised. In extreme cases, plagiarism may be classed as a dishonest practice under Section IV, 5 (a) (x) of the General Regulations and may lead to expulsion. The facilitation of plagiarism through publication may also be classed as a dishonest practice under Section IV, 5 (a) (x) of the General Regulations and may lead to expulsion. (See also General Regulation X, Intellectual Property Rights).

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I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Durham University. I confirm that this piece of work is the result of my own work. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree. Material from the work of others not involved in the dissertation has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitable indicated.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in not way represent those of Durham University.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed _____ Date: _____

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the Study

Asynchronous writing tutoring has become a useful and popular tool for North American college and university writing centres (Hewett, 2010: 15). Writing centres can serve at least two major educational purposes: to provide students with an opportunity to have a conversation with a peer or professional tutor about their personal (e.g., job applications or resumes) or academic writing (Harris, 2008); and to support the academic institution or department by providing resources for instructors, sponsoring reading events to encourage discussion, conducting workshops for special needs groups, among many other efforts (North, 1984). Traditionally, writing centres have worked from within educational institutions to provide students with writing support outside of the classroom, on a face-to-face basis. Students can visit their local centre in-person and have a conversation about their writing with a tutor. However, over the last two decades, computers have provided writing centres many opportunities to conduct their work online, both synchronously (e.g., a live video chat with Skype) and asynchronously (e.g., email), via platforms that have come to be known as Online Writing Labs (OWLs). Many factors, like the increasing popularity of online schooling and distance learning, have made these platforms a beneficial educational tool that can be used by both traditional and non-traditional (i.e., distance) students.

One such platform, for example, the OWL at Salt Lake Community College, in Salt Lake City, Utah, has been working to improve the asynchronous writing tutoring service it provides to students. The administrators and employees

of the centre have come to understand what it is like to be at tension with a system that does not easily lend itself to deep introspective discussion, a feature typically found in synchronous writing tutoring sessions. A unique characteristic of this centre is that the language demographic of the students they serve is diverse. And students who have made use of the centre's email tutoring over the last three years reflect this; 65% of asynchronous email tutoring submissions are from native English speakers and the rest from non-native speakers of English.

Employees of the centre state that non-native speaking students can encounter difficulty when submitting assignments asynchronously to the online centre. When students submit their work for email tutoring, for example, they are required to complete a basic version of what is essentially a needs analysis questionnaire. They must provide the centre with information about themselves and their class, assignment, writing questions, and areas of writing interest. Even though students have the opportunity to submit highly relevant information, such as details about their assignment sheet or the questions they have, some utilise the online submission form in a very minimal way, with responses such as one word, "memoir," or statements like "can you fix my grammar?" (the latter example suggesting that some students neglect reading the posted *Terms of Service*, text visible to the student which explains the various services that the OWL does and does not offer). Submissions like this are not uncommon, and somewhat understandable, given that previous research has shown some difficulties with questionnaire use (e.g., Dörnyei et al., 2009: 7). For example, Liu et al. (2011) found that students may misunderstand the concepts presented to them via questionnaires. In her study, the questionnaires that asked students about the areas

of language they perceived needing were not representative of the courses they chose. If OWLs practise the use of questionnaires to gauge student needs, as the OWL at Salt Lake Community College does, some oversight must be given in situations where the use of a questionnaire could come into conflict with the student's ability to complete that questionnaire appropriately. Moreover, situations like these call for a better understanding of how OWLs can recognize the immediate and future needs of their students (and the tutors who assist them) so as to avoid situations where they may be hindered or unable to fully participate due to language issues which cannot be foreseen prior to an asynchronous submission. There has been much written on how to develop and improve questionnaires for language learning environments (e.g., Dörnyei, 2010), but little on the effective analysis of student needs in asynchronous writing tutoring.

1.2 The Gap between Needs Analysis and Online Writing Labs

The use of needs analysis has yet to be explicitly studied within writing centres and, more specifically to this dissertation, OWLs. On one hand, much of needs analysis literature is based around shaping the content of a course to be taken by a group of learners with particular needs. On the other hand, writing centre interactions are nothing like those of a traditional classroom. In person, students are paired with a professional or peer writing advisor who will sit and talk with them for an average of 30 minutes to an hour (Ryan. 2002). As is apparent with email tutoring, students and tutors never meet and are left only with the information their particular institution's online platform is built to consider. The OWL format of providing feedback is efficient by nature; students submit

their work, and a tutor responds. If the student is particularly engaged, there may be some further dialogue over email. The student's initial submission may be the only time tutors have to understand the needs of a student, which supports the argument that writing centres should immediately, accurately, and "deductively" ascertain student needs (Berwick, 1989). Furthermore, studies of writing centre interaction with non-native speakers posit that the historical nature of writing centre interactions with non-native speakers has been fraught with uncertainty and a lack of dominating methodology (Matsuda, 1999). Students enter what information they may, and a tutor must work with whatever information they receive. So, it may come as no surprise that a gap exists within the literature of needs analysis and OWLs, as a surface view of the two may appear incongruous; in other words, needs analyses were built with an intention of affecting classroom curriculum development, while writing centres and their OWLs serve as an educational service existing outside of the classroom. Matsuda (1999) observes that this may be due to the notion that Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and second-language writing scholastics evolved independent of each other, seeking to develop an authentic way of approaching their studies.

While there are practical guides that provide insights and methods to developing a successful OWL and/or practising effective online writing tutoring (Hobson, 1998; Coogan, 1999; Rilling, 2005; Lerner and Gillespie, 2008; Hewett, 2010), much is left to be desired regarding how to understand student needs, especially compared to what has been done under the scope of needs analysis in the past 30 years. Much of asynchronous OWL literature focuses on the standing differences between face-to-face tutoring and email tutoring. Discussions in such

papers navigate through textually-based forms of feedback (Tuzi, 2004), interaction theories like social constructivism (Lapadat, 2002), pragmatic considerations (Hobson, 1998), tutor roles (Breuch and Racine, 2000), and various other topics. While it is argued that a great amount of social benefit is lost on asynchronous methods (Coogan, 1999), positive outcomes can be seen in the distance learning community (Gardner, 1998), and potentially decreasing the levels of anxiety for both native and non-native speakers (Hurd, 2007), for example. Furthermore, Calfee (2007) shows how asynchronous writing tutoring can be an effective learning platform. In this study, students who received asynchronous writing tutoring performed better than those in a control group and even just one asynchronous tutoring session could significantly improve participants' grades, while further sessions were shown to be even more beneficial.

1.3 Determining the Research Grounds

At this time there are a very low number of studies looking at how writing centres conduct needs analysis asynchronously. However, it is clear that writing centres conduct—at least synchronously—some form of needs analysis. Elements of needs analysis can be seen embedded within the theories and methodologies of tutoring. For example, a standard rhetorical tool used in writing centres is some variation on “How can I help you today?”, a viewpoint that was shaped out of writing centre scholastics and a question that provokes a myriad of responses which can take a tutoring session in almost any direction. As one great contributor to the study of writing centre practice famously put it, “Our job is to produce

better writers, not better writing” (North, 1984). So, then, if it is accepted that writing centres and their OWL counterparts are stationed to improve the linguistic, rhetorical, and practical writing abilities of their students, as opposed to simply correcting errors, it may be of benefit to explore where needs analysis methods can be used in these situations to gauge the specific context that each centre, and indeed each session, revolves around. While the aforementioned OWL studies show the breadth and value of asynchronous tutoring, there exists a void to be filled with the empirical efforts of describing and understanding the process by which OWLs conduct needs analysis. In order to better understand and inform current OWL practices, this study focuses on the following questions:

- ❖ How can needs analysis be contextualised for use by an OWL?
- ❖ What are currently existing OWLs doing to understand the needs of their students?
- ❖ What model of needs analysis can be developed for OWLs?

And to provide insight on these topics, this study:

- ❖ examines the literature on needs analysis in order to describe its purposes and uses, while making connections to similar purposes and uses of writing centres;
- ❖ conducts a study on college and university OWLs in North America that investigates the tools and strategies used during asynchronous writing tutoring;
- ❖ and, synthesises these two aspects to explore how OWLs are conducting needs analysis.

1.4 Overview

In the next chapter, some relevant literature of needs analysis will be reviewed and explained in preparation for application to an OWL context. The scope of needs analysis is vast and its uses wide. Not all aspects of needs analysis are applicable or relevant to this study. The approach used in this dissertation focuses on the brief history, purposes, and current practices of needs analysis. Throughout this review, parallels in writing centre practice and theory will be connected with needs analysis literature to gain a better understanding of the significant aspects of needs analysis and whether or not they have been previously considered in some way by writing centre scholars.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used for this dissertation's study of North American writing centres. Primarily, a questionnaire research tool was developed with the assistance of an informant, a North American writing centre director who operates an OWL. A popular writing centre mailing list was used to circulate the survey. The questionnaire was developed with the intent of discovering various types of information regarding how writing centres are currently positioned to conduct needs analysis. Four main topics are chosen for the survey: asynchronous approach, reporting, tutor training and positioning, and student interaction. In this chapter, a rationale is given for the research tool and its development is described along with its distribution and collection stages.

In order to provide a thorough examination of the survey results, the findings and discussion are presented side by side. In this way it is easy to see the needs analysis functions and capabilities of writing centres. At the same time, comments are given where certain functions may be lacking, or greatly beneficial

to the pursuit of a legitimate needs analysis. At this point it can be seen that writing centres do utilise various strategies to learn about the needs of their students. However, arguments are presented throughout this section that suggest writing centres could be making a stronger effort to conduct certain types of needs analysis.

The conclusion discusses some key findings of the study in relation to needs analysis. The four main topics from the study are synthesised in a brief discussion that attempts to develop a model of needs analysis for OWLs. The writing centre community is called to further this discussion and work towards better understanding how needs analysis can benefit asynchronous tutoring services.

2 Defining Needs Analysis under the Scope of an Online Writing Lab

2.1 The Movements of Needs Analysis and Writing Centres towards Learner-Enabling Practices

The study of needs analysis has evolved over recent years to incorporate a wide range of sources and methods with the often dynamic nature of language instruction. By identifying the needs that come from all sides of the learning environment (e.g., governmental, institutional, departmental, student, instructor, and so on) educators can focus their efforts on imparting practical and valuable knowledge to students. In the case of OWLs, there have not been many significant investigations of learner needs. In practise, many writing centres will rely on occasional satisfaction surveys to gauge how well they are meeting their students' needs (e.g., Fisher et al., 2003).

Needs analysis has been used to improve various teaching fields, such as English for Specific or Academic Purposes (ESP or EAP), as its purpose is to use empirically-based methods to delineate and evaluate the various entities and factors which have an impact on language learning in student populations which require specialized language curriculum. Certainly, the language that students bring to the writing centre is specialised in such a way that EAP is specialised; assignments given at the college and university level revolve around the particular rhetoric that exists within the area of study or discipline. While OWLs do not require needs analysis for the purposes of developing curriculum per se, much advantage can be gained from the aspects that allow tutors to better understand who their students are. Additionally, needs analysis can facilitate the intake of student submissions so that they provide the adequate resources for tutoring to

take place. Researchers see great value in needs analysis and recognise its importance in developing strong educational strategies (Hyland 2006; Long 2005; West, 1998; Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991; Robinson, 1991). Long (2005: 12) argues that needs analysis has the ability to make effective changes to language teachers and programmes, which improve success.

West (1994) describes needs analyses as originally developed to adapt course syllabuses with regard to learners' target use areas, which is still a core approach (e.g., Liu et al., 2011; Spence et al., 2013; Akyel et al., 2010). West (1994) suggests, "Needs analysis is, by its very nature, a pragmatic activity based on highly localised situations." This statement essentially mirrors two key aspects of writing centre interactions, as tutoring scholars have previously noted and called for more use of pragmatic methods (Thonus, 2002), and writing tutorials are also, by nature, localised in a very specific context. Before needs analysis began to influence the content that would be taught in a course, a vast amount of instruction was focused on a product-based design, which de-emphasised the learner and targeted the products they were able to produce. However, with the increasing popularity of second language acquisition theory and the developments of ESP, instructors and researchers began to shift their focus from the products of language instruction to the learner's language acquisition process (Nunan 1988; Hutchinson and Waters, 1984). At the same time, writing centres began adopting social constructionist theory (Bruffee, 1984), which shifted the focus of tutoring from working on students' issues for the sake of gaining their audience's praise to working on issues for the sake of understanding the ways in which the discourse community affected the student, and thus improving their learning process. For

writing centres, these changes meant a new approach to tutoring that was less focused on providing information to a person regardless of their background, and more focused on understanding the two people in the tutoring session and how they can best trade information. The shift in needs analysis came with the implication that, in order to meet the unique language needs of a given group of learners, actual language *tasks* must be understood through the use of empirical methods (Hyland, 2007; Long, 2005; West 1994; Munby, 1978).

2.2 Tasks inside the Writing Centre

The development of tasks has been a highly important component of needs analysis. In Long (2005), the use of tasks as units of analysis is paired with the methodologies supporting analytic syllabuses and task-based language teaching. For Long (2005: 22-24), it is appropriate that needs analysis should produce task-based units which are ultimately going to be used by learners, a notion which he supports with the following arguments:

1. The abilities required by institutionalised sectors (e.g., employment, educational, military, and so on) are described via background information, performance standards, and tasks. While dependent on the situation and only verifiable through direct study, it may be that analyses done by “expert insiders” will be more fitting to these descriptions than those done by “outsiders” (i.e., teachers and linguists).

2. Linguistically-based analyses, as opposed to task-based, do not provide enough of the actual uses of language to be fitting for real world communication. And even the pieces of language that are exhibited in this analysis are not

contextualised for course developers.

3. The courses that stem from linguistically analysed units are flawed in that these units focus on the product of what has already been discovered by someone else, but not necessarily the process by which they learned it. Task-based analyses are oriented around describing the process of language learning.

4. It cannot be expected that expert insiders are able to convey knowledge about the type of language they use, or that linguists are able to know the content of the language used. However, task-based analysis has the potential to alleviate these issues by letting the two informants compensate each other's differences.

5. Task-based analyses produce material that is directly applicable to analytic and task-based syllabuses which are focused on the learner by virtue of their methodologies.

Certainly, the curricula that most writing centres encounter are different, yet each centre is subject to the basic academic formats of writing, the mechanics of which are widely governed by the style guides produced by academic groups (e.g., the Modern Language Association, the American Psychological Association or Harvard). These guides, and other institutionally-based documents (e.g., hand-outs, assignment sheets, course books) exist to fill out the limits of what is locally required to be understood by students, thereby creating a unique imprint on each writing centre. Also, these resources act as texts which can be used as target-situation examples during the course of a needs analysis, in some cases providing exact language needs within their respective discourses. Assignment sheets, for example, are an excellent source of task-based information that pertains directly to what students are visiting the writing centre for. Many of the writing tasks that

learners must become proficient at are found in these kinds of sources.

2.3 *The Tools of Needs Analysis*

One of the first methods for needs analysis was the *target-situation analysis*, the process of defining task-based language as used in the learner's expected real-world environment (Chambers, 1980). For some time, Munby (1981) exemplified how these types of analyses can be used in the course development process; however, some saw his approach as too time consuming to perform multiple times on the same group of learners throughout an extended course (West, 1994). This method typified the use of a survey or questionnaire regarding areas of language use that were related to learner's interests and needs. These types of analyses were the first steps to deriving practical and applicable information from learners and their eventual language use areas, but later research widely expanded to include more areas of analysis. In the years following Chambers (1980), the study of needs analysis experienced rapid stages of introspection and gained additional analytical strategies. For example, computer assisted techniques, like "corpus analyses" in ESP (which can quickly reveal authentic uses of language) and "auto-tutorials" in writing centres (computer programmes built to automatically guide students through various types of focused language lessons), were used to broadly identify and practise language skills (Kennedy, 1990; Coogan, 1995).

Long (2005) and West (1994) give insightfully detailed accounts of the practical and theoretical foundations of needs analysis by offering a structured overview of the sources and methods to be considered when studying and

performing needs analysis in the wide scope of language learning situations. West (1994) elaborates on the many practicalities of needs analysis while providing explanations for the expanded categorisations of analyses beyond target-situation analysis: deficiency, strategy, means, and language analyses. And in the search for valid, reliable methods and sources, Long (2005) outlines both the major outlets of information about needs analysis: published/unpublished literature, learners, teachers and applied linguists, domain experts, and triangulated sources; as well as a long list of employable methods, or perspectives, of study: expert/non-expert intuitions, structured/unstructured interviews, surveys/questionnaires, language audits, ethnography, participant/non-participant observation, classroom observation, diaries/journals/logs, role plays, content/discourse/register analyses, computer-aided corpus analysis, genre analysis, performance tests, and triangulated methods. The expansiveness of this inventory speaks to the often complex nature of needs analysis studies and practice.

2.4 Recognising Perceptual Differences

Writing centres may find benefit in using different perspectives of analysis to understand not only more about their students, but also more about themselves and their institutions. The outcomes of a legitimate needs analysis can lead to better understandings of the many qualities and conventions of student and tutor perceptions. For example, Jasso-Aguilar's (2005) study of hotel maids found that motivation is likely to drop when learners are taught language that they do not perceive they need. The meeting of tutor and learner perceptions is ideal in a session, as they are essential governors of communication, understanding and

motivation within a community (Nunan, 1988; Alruhaimi 2011). And coupled with the notion that asynchronous sessions take place in physically distant, isolated contexts, it is important that, as educators, writing centres pay attention to aspects of the practice that affect motivation. Language produces a large range of usage and meaning that can easily confuse understanding between speakers. In the writing centre, this is further complicated by the plethora of terms and ideas that are unique to writing and writing instruction. It cannot be assumed that both participants will have a similar understanding of the topics discussed (or any understanding in the case of a student, allowing the tutor an opportunity to teach and hopefully improve future interactions) (Liu et al., 2011; Gorham et al., 1990).

Research conducted earlier this year during a Research Methods course, in anticipation of this dissertation, also indicated a difference of perceptual needs between students and tutors using an asynchronous online system at a two-year community college. The purpose of the study was to analyse the differences between the questions students asked about their writing versus the topics their tutors responded to. It was found that tutors addressed students' questions roughly half of the time (56%). Additional findings suggested that tutors were more likely to respond to higher-order concerns, rather than later-order concerns, whether or not the student requested that kind of help¹. This does not seem unusual, as subjugating later-order concerns is common in tutoring and focused on in tutor training (Blau et al., 2002). However, this seemingly built-in function of writing tutoring could be a factor in the differences between what students and tutors

¹ In writing centre pedagogy, higher-order are considered to be thesis, voice, organisation, and development, whereas later-order concerns are sentence- and word-level issues (for discussion, see Reigstad and McAndrew, 1984). It is common for tutors to focus on higher-order concerns before later-order concerns.

perceive to be the purpose of the writing centre. Tutors are practised in focusing on aspects that students need to be aware of in order to fulfil their assignments and writing goals; however, many students simply do not perceive that these aspects are of primary importance to the tutor during a session—many students believe that the writing centre is a place to have their paper fixed for them, for example. These discrepancies show that a tutoring session may be stymied when students are not given enough information about what their particular writing centre can do for them, before, during, and after a session.

From this review, it can be seen that needs analysis and writing centres share similar pedagogical directions, but they have yet to be understood together. A focal point of this dissertation is to conduct a study of currently active OWLs to learn more about what their capabilities are and how they operate with regard to gauging student needs. The next chapter provides a rationale for the study and describes its development and purposes.

3 Methods

3.1 Determining the Research Tool

Writing centres have the tendency to build their methods in a “home-grown” way, as one respondent put it. Many strategies are developed based on local constraints, student base, institutional goals, and so on. And due to varying levels of institutional funding, each centre has differing capabilities, space, personnel, mission, and so on. Aside from various existing writing associations and consortia, which seek to connect writing centres and writing centre scholars, there is no unified entity that regulates writing centres and their practice. Like many learning institutions, writing centre professionals pick and choose the methods and strategies they approach their work with. Although, there are many similarities that online writing centres share, with only a handful of formats used for asynchronous communication, like email or an online classroom management system. So, an investigation of writing centres, and the methods used therein, is needed to better understand what is already being done by writing centres, institutionally and professionally, within the scope of needs analysis.

3.2 A Rationale for Questionnaires

A questionnaire was chosen as the primary instrument of study in part because many types of information can be collected with relative ease, while collected data may be both quantitative and qualitative, both of which this study seeks. Babcock and Thonus (2012: 36) posit that the best tools for researching the writing centre for qualitative data are observation, interview, and document collection. While the researcher agrees with this stance on a local level, it does not

lend itself to conducting a landscape survey that obtains a wide understanding of current practices, which this research study intends to do. While it is fair to say these techniques would be suitable for use within a single centre, they do not readily apply themselves to surveying multiple centres, which exist states and countries apart, and of which there are hundreds. Furthermore, the issue becomes more complicated when the area of study is based in asynchronous communications. For instance, how does one observe an asynchronous tutoring session?

However, were there more time and resources for this study, it would be beneficial to adopt these methods, as they could potentially elicit more varied and contrasting data than a questionnaire, but not by a large margin. Open-ended questions in questionnaires are no different than those asked in a traditional interview, other than that the researcher has no opportunity to respond. This issue, also noted by Dörnyei et al. (2009: 7-8), was acknowledged during the development of the survey and partially resolved by the temporary collection of participants' names and e-mails, which will be explained below.

The use of questionnaires in language research is common (Long, 2005; Dörnyei et al., 2009), and writing centres are no different. Dörnyei et al. (2009: 6-9) argue that the reliability and validity of a questionnaire can come into question due to aspects that can affect a participant's ability to successfully complete the questionnaire (e.g., language complexity or motivation). While the arguments made are reasonable, they do not seem to carry as heavy of a weight in this study as they would in more student-centred types of language research. Firstly, upon devising the set of questions for this questionnaire, the “simplicity” of language

was important, but questions did not need to be so explicitly laid out; nor could one assume that respondents would not have the requisite language ability needed to understand the questions and respond to them in kind. The respondents surveyed would be writing centre professionals who, for the most part, are undoubtedly familiar with the terms involved, such as genres and the types of data that their centre handles. Additionally, it can be assumed that participants are motivated to fill out the survey (or at least take it in the first place) as the questionnaire was stated as being optional for participants to complete, which will be discussed later. The only real issue of interest, considering the views of Dörnyei et al., is that of “prestige bias,” or when respondents report feelings instead of known facts. Of course, this can be an issue in any questionnaire. But the primary goal of this questionnaire is to solicit information about the participant’s writing centre; the set of data to be analysed would not include any information about the participant themselves. While this does not eradicate the possibility of bias, nothing fully can.

Previous research on improving survey response rate has also exposed some good techniques to consider when conducting a survey online. Nulty (2008), for example, gives coverage on previously devised strategies for making the best of an online surveying effort. Some strategies that were used throughout this effort include: making the survey link as accessible as possible by showing it clearly in the opening email; occasionally reminding the target population about the survey while it was active by sending out weekly e-mails; and keeping the survey open for a relatively long time (in this case four weeks).

3.3 Questionnaire Design

The online questionnaire consisted of five pages covering 23 questions (Appendix 1). In order to inform the participants about the topic, two paragraphs briefly went over the purposes of needs analysis, as previously delineated in this study. Also, a specific context was provided relating needs analysis to its applications in online writing tutoring. All questions were made optional so participants felt free to share what information they were confident in. Nevertheless, “Other” text-boxes and “Don’t Know” options were put in place to assure the participant would have a chance to explain more, or opt-out, respectively.

With one of the purposes of this dissertation being to synthesise the methods of needs analysis and asynchronous writing centres, it was not an obvious task to develop items for a questionnaire based on these topics. Using needs analysis terms might prove to be confusing for the target group, for example. So, a basic set of questions about data collection and reporting of tutoring sessions was developed with the intention of gauging how writing centres collect and document the needs of students. In order to receive feedback on these ideas and achieve some level of triangulation (which is of great importance according to Long (2005), for example), this study made use of an informant. Clint Gardner, the director of Salt Lake Community College’s writing centre, was contacted to discuss and evaluate the questionnaire items and coding used during the analysis. He has been overseeing the centre’s OWL since 1995 and is also an active member of the writing centre community, having published multiple papers and presented at numerous conventions. From the discussions that arose with the

informant, an expanded list of survey questions was created, and it is hoped they are pertinent to describing some of the aspects of asynchronous tutoring practice in regards to needs analysis.

To begin the survey, participants were asked for their name, email, position, institution name and type. While no personally- or institutionally-identifiable data was used in the process of analysing the data, it was temporarily recorded to not only clear up any uncertainties in the data collection process, but also provide opportunities to clean the data. Aside from these uses, it was discarded before analysis. Asking for institution type was important, as the study was only focused on higher education institutions, and this question would assure that criteria in the evaluation stage of data analysis.

Addressing functional capabilities, participants were asked to comment on how their centre conducted asynchronous tutoring. Did it only rely on email? Or did it make use of a classroom management system? Perhaps some centres used custom online software in conjunction with these platforms, such as the one at Salt Lake Community College. Also, the types of documents that each centre assisted with was collected to see, on the whole, how prepared asynchronous centres were to support the varying types of modalities and documents which students may be working on. This is an important area to investigate in order to develop a picture of how complex the feedback needs of some writing centres can be, and how these needs can vary widely from centre to centre, which presents the issue of making a model that can be applied broadly. Some may support essays to poetry and everything in between, while others may only support essays.

To investigate how information is collected and used by writing centres,

participants were asked to respond to the ways in which their centre makes use of data gathered about their students and asynchronous sessions: what information is saved; whether or not tutors use these reports to inform sessions in the future; and whether or not students view them as well. Largely important to this section of the survey is the topic regarding types of data collected. Certainly, the preliminary draft of the questionnaire did not have an extensive list of types of data that could be collected. However, it may prove beneficial to see what additional types of data these centres collected (they are given an option to add more), as each additional piece of data that is collected about the student, their assignment, or their context means a stronger foundation from which to understand their needs.

Continuing, the survey examines topics concerning the tutors who work at the centre in terms of number of tutors, tutoring methodologies, and protocols that are used when responding to students. Probably the most telling area of this questionnaire, the topic of asynchronous tutoring methods and response protocols, contains much of the qualitative data found in this study. As described earlier, writing centres have a home-grown quality to them that creates a mixture of methods and practices that work together. Studying these methods should shed light on what concepts are focused on within writing centre practice, and in turn may reveal sources where student needs are discussed.

The survey ends with a focus on the students of these writing centres. Participants were asked to describe how many students their centre saw in an average 3-month term, whether or not the centre conducts satisfaction surveys, and if they do, an average estimate of student satisfaction. Of greatest interest in this section of the survey is the topic of whether or not the centre collects

satisfaction surveys after tutoring sessions. It is important to see the level at which writing centres are conducting these surveys as they can act as direct evidence of “professional accountability” (Weir & Roberts, 1994: 5), part of which reflects how well student needs are being met.

3.4 Determining the Survey Sample

After developing the questionnaire, a population sample had to be selected. Considering options for contacting writing centre professionals across North America, the WCENTER mailing list was selected. WCENTER, courtesy of Texas Tech University, is a widely used mailing list throughout the writing centre community. It has been in use since the early Nineties by writing centre scholars of many backgrounds and aptitudes. The community remains very active today and is an excellent resource for writing centre discussion and scholarship. Anyone may join the list and post writing centre related information. Inter-community research is common on WCENTER, with questionnaires appearing occasionally, so the target sample group likely encounters them at least once a month.

As time and cost prohibited any sort of “probability sampling,” which would allow for a highly accurate sample, “non-probability sampling” had to be the method used to build a sample for this study, which means there were no analyses done beforehand in order to develop criteria for the sample (Dörnyei et al., 2009, 60-61). The only criterion for the study were that participants must be writing centre employees working in a North American writing centre at a higher education institution. Additionally, as the questionnaire was to be e-mailed to an open email list, which advertises itself as a place for writing centre professionals,

the sample can be seen as randomised as there was no way of knowing who would respond. It was decided by the researcher that participation would be optional in order to encourage participants to speak freely and without expectations placed upon them. In this sense, participants were self-selecting; if they read the email and chose to fill out the survey, they were allowed.

3.5 Conducting the Survey

An email was drafted which introduced the researcher, the programme of study, a brief synopsis of the topic, and a link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire. SurveyMonkey was chosen because it offers quick and effective solutions for questionnaire development, data collecting, and data analysis. Also, data can be easily exported for use with data analysis software. As WCENTER is open for anyone to post to, it was necessary that the email elicit a few key points about the research. Readers were greeted by the researcher, who attempted to build rapport by explaining that they had been a long time reader of the mailing list, yet had not shared anything with the community at that point. The researcher's programme of study was introduced, along with the institution of study. Then, a description of the topic and specific context were explained. After this, potential participants were told that their participation in the study would be optional. Personal information would be collected about them, but this was only for the purposes of maintaining clarity during and after the collection process, and would be discarded before analysis. Finally, a link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire was provided and participants were thanked in advance for their support. The questionnaire began development on 29 June, 2013, and the email was sent on 24 June.

3.6 Collection and Preliminary Cleaning

After four weeks and multiple solicitations to the WCENTER mailing list, a total of 65 responses were collected and the survey was closed. SurveyMonkey allows paying users to download the dataset for use with spreadsheet software like Excel. Upon initial examination of the data, it was clear that not all participants fit the scope of this study. This was an anticipated circumstance, as WCENTER membership varies widely, partially made up of centres existing outside the context of this study, and required the data to be cleaned. In Excel, the data was converted to numerical data with labels so that it may be used in SPSS, “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences,” a powerful statistical software package. The data collected was the result of questions based on classification and rating systems. Therefore, in SPSS it was important to set the data variables as numerical ordinal data, which essentially allowed the data to be processed as objects (e.g., 0=Don't know, 1=No, 2=Yes), and not actual numbers. This meant that the data had to be cleaned. The cleaning of data is important to make sure that there are no inconsistencies (Dörnyei et al., 2009), and is better accomplished when the questionnaire is structured to organise the data into specific groups, institutional or other, as reflected in the following passage.

When asked if their centre provides asynchronous online tutoring to their students, seven respondents answered “No,” three did not answer (and also provided no data after this question), and one answered “Don't Know.” Therefore, these 11 were immediately removed from the dataset, as the study is only focused on those centres who said that they did support asynchronous tutoring. Upon further review, it was found that one participant had selected being located within

a high school, yet this study is focused on college- and university-level institutions. Also, two responses were submitted by writing centres located in Hungary and Germany, which did not fulfil the need for participants to be working in North American writing centres. These three were also removed from the dataset.

There are many research tools that can be used to study the writing centre. However, it was decided that a questionnaire would not only have the most effective reach, but also include various types of data. The questions were developed with an understanding of the importance of triangulation, and so an informant assisted in the development process. The survey was distributed to an easily accessible writing centre email list, and collected after four weeks. After collection, the data was imported into statistical software and cleaned. Having removed respondents that did not fit the criteria of the study, the data was fit to be analysed.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Evaluating the Sample Representation of Participants

Aside from personally identifiable information, which was discarded after data cleaning, the first page of the survey allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants, their institutions, and their roles in the writing centre. Of the 51 participants who remained after data cleaning, seven were from Associates Colleges, four were from Baccalaureate Colleges, 28 were from Doctorate-granting Universities, ten were from Master's Colleges/Universities, and two were from Special Focus Institutions. These categorisations are based on the Carnegie classification of higher education institutions, developed in part to improve research outcomes (McCormick, 2001). Certainly, they proved to be useful when cleaning the data. The participants came from a sizeable group of positions within the writing centre, from director to "web content coordinator," which already brings up a crucial aspect of performing needs analysis in an online environment.

Near the onset of OWL development, Harris and Pemberton (1995) made a case for the need of online writing centres to employ a computer programmer who "will attempt to understand a writing centre's goals, methods, and philosophy." And yet in this present day study, only one participant was even minimally similar to matching the description of a computer programmer. It may be that writing centres are beginning to institutionalise positions that require web development and communication activities, perhaps instead of sourcing them from other departments or from outside the institution. Undoubtedly, the benefits of a computer programmer can empower a writing centre with far-reaching abilities in the methods of conducting needs analysis. There is no way to consider the entirety

of what can be accomplished by a computer programme on the internet. Based on the creativity of the programmer, websites can offer many ways of eliciting information that go beyond answering questions or filling in text forms; for example, complex database techniques can also be used to cross reference information about learners and tutoring sessions that might not be apparent otherwise. The use of professional computer programmes should not in any way go overlooked as centres continue to build up their capacity to conduct needs analysis.

The roles of the participants in this study are important to examine so that it can be said whether or not they represent a sample group that likely recognises and understands the inner workings of their centre's asynchronous work. The informant was asked to devise a simple coding system to classify each position type, based on their departmental status. Another list was devised by the researcher, separate from the informant's, and the two lists were assimilated after a brief discussion. The results showed that 17 participants were administrators (directors) (33%), 12 were staff members (coordinators) (24%), 11 were tutors (22%), five were faculty/admin (10%), and there were three (6%) each from faculty and faculty/staff positions².

This appears to be a strong group of respondents for this particular survey, as many questions regard characteristics of a writing centre that are outside of the act of tutoring itself, topics that one might expect the director or coordinator of a writing centre to be comfortable talking about. However, this is not to say that a

² The number of tutors responding to the survey may appear low for having e-mailed a writing centre email list which can likely be attributed to the fact that the survey was conducted in the midst of summer, when many centres do not need to employ as many tutors, or shut their doors altogether. Based on its archives, WCENTER has 2455 subscribers, meaning this survey had a 2.6% response rate, which may also explain small response numbers from one group in particular.

tutor would have a much less applicable set of knowledge on these topics. But as the large majority of respondents held some sort of form of administrative position, it is clear that responses would be representative of the people who oversee and maintain their centre's asynchronous efforts.

4.2 How Centres Approach Asynchronous Tutoring

One interest of the study was to discover the ways that writing centres communicate in their asynchronous sessions. Based on the type of platform that is used, the level of needs which can be addressed changes drastically. For example, with a purely email based system, there is no recourse to take in student information or needs outside of what is asked in the initial submission. But with something like a "Classroom Management System" (CMS), developers can essentially make their own web pages that will allow the centre to take in student information in the same way as a custom-built website, or an intake sheet used at a physical writing centre. Although, an argument could be made that the ambiguity and crossover of services on the Internet render any distinction between platforms as minimally significant. For example, what is the difference between a dedicated email platform, like Microsoft Outlook, versus the email one receives inside their CMS? Email is email. However, platforms that expand their functionalities to include other means of communication are likely to collect a greater variety of information about their students. The information that can be gained from students largely relies on the platform used.

To determine what asynchronous platforms are being used, participants were allowed to select as many as three asynchronous platform options (Email,

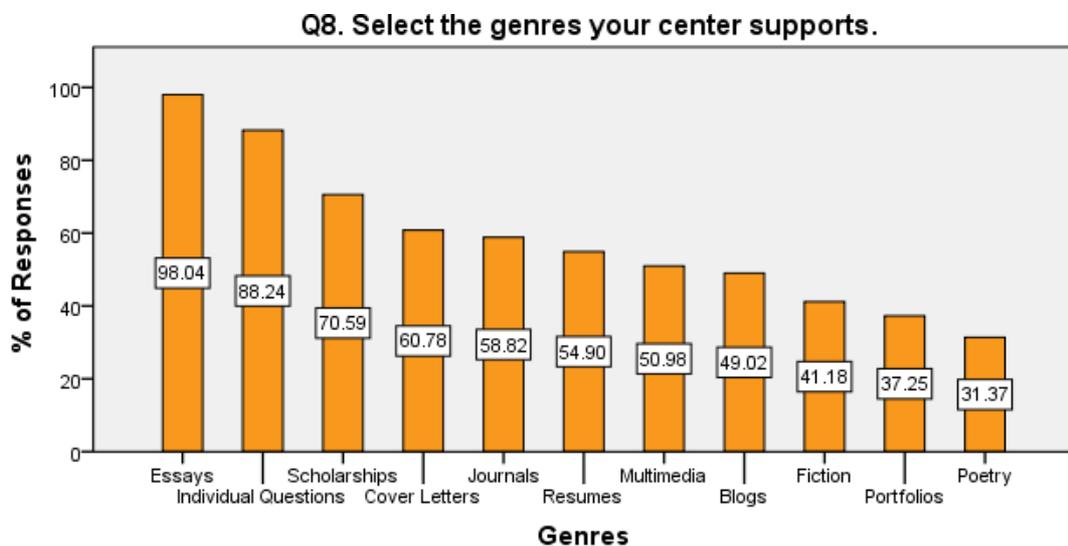
Forums, and CMS), while relying on them to provide further examples using the “Other” comment box. It was found that 86% of participants use email, 18% use web bulletin boards/forums, and 16% use their institutions CMS. Some centres use just one, while some make use of all three. Of the responses to the “Other” box, two stood out to the researcher as unique formats of asynchronous response.

The first response refers to an “asynchronous chat feature” included in the professional web conferencing software used by one participant. While the idea of a “chat” seems to imply synchronous usage, it is quite feasible that instant-messaging systems can be used in an asynchronous method. As long as both tutor and student are aware of the tutoring context, there is nothing disallowing them from carrying on a conversation at a different pace and at different times. In fact, this style of conversation could benefit learning through the nurturing of dialogue, a traditional characteristic of writing centre interactions.

Another participant cited the use of a “Ning Community” which is a private social networking platform that a person can purchase and develop for their own purposes and audiences. Like CMS platforms, social networking platforms can create extremely interactive pages that not only allow for many opportunities to collect needs but also facilitate the development of relationships within the community. These platforms can open up doors for peer tutoring between students, or inadvertent learning, when students are using the service together in the same virtual space.

To investigate the nature of the environment in which writing centres can find themselves, in terms of supporting various genres, assignment types, or requests, participants were asked to select the kinds of assignments that their

centre supports. The assignments a centre supports has a direct impact on their need, again, to provide tutors with explicit and clear training on what kind of knowledge is needed in order to give appropriate and relevant feedback. The list of assignments—or “genres” as they are referred to in the survey—was developed with assistance from the informant and with the intention of including texts that fall outside of the typical academic rhetoric. These responses have been collected in the following graph.



Graph 1: Genres supported by writing centres

The wide range of documents that writing centres support is apparent. While most centres support academically-based writing such as essays or scholarships, there are far fewer participants who claim that there is support for so-called “creative” writing genres like fiction and poetry. Interestingly, only 51% (n=51) of centres support multimedia documents, which suggests that student needs may not be acknowledged in cases where the student is tasked with an assignment that goes beyond just writing, as many assignments do with an increasing integration of technology in the classroom and online learning

programmes. Does this response suggest that 49% of participants have not supported or been confronted with a multimedia document at some point? Perhaps some centres do not see themselves as able to help in this capacity, which is a case for further study. Indeed, the mission of writing centres is not singular, and each fills some sort of function required by local constraints.

The results here may be an indicator that some writing centres underestimate their potential levels of support, as has been previously argued (Gardner, 2012). For example, consider the difference in purpose between an argumentative essay and a script to be used in a class video project; these texts are separated by a very thin line. Words are still used in their production, but for clearly different purposes: the essay is for reading, and the script is for speaking. While it is the right, and duty, of each centre to say where they draw the line (some centres will look at the script, some may not), most centres could, in some sense, be prepared for situations where they are asked to support locally unorthodox texts. In the example, the student brought the script for a capstone video project to a tutor; a fair discernment suggests the tutor's need to provide feedback on the writing, regardless of intended medium.

The "Other" comment box was used to provide additional "genres" that were not thought of in the original survey, and responses were extensive. While some of the following may overlap, they may be beneficial for use in further study: reflections, single paragraphs, prospectuses, personal statements, capstone papers, literature reviews, theses, dissertations, doctoral studies, research projects, lab reports, clinical briefs, legalese, business documents, speeches, interdisciplinary writing, group projects, faculty and staff writing tasks (i.e.,

grants, case reports, manuscripts, assignment descriptions), discussion board posts, letters, proposals, and articles for publication or books. While this list includes many aspects of writing assignments, it is certainly not comprehensive; and regardless, new assignment types are designed often and it is likely that writing centres will continue to expand this list as time goes on.

One indicator of the popularity of online tutoring—and a resource that has helped shape how writing centres do work online—has been the recent growth of professional online tutoring software. Primarily, these professionally developed platforms are centred around fulfilling the need to report a centre's sessions; however, some offer expanded functionality. In the case of needs analysis in the writing centre, reporting is a major asset. A fundamental aspect of understanding student needs is through the collection of information regarding the students' learning, and this is what reporting can provide. Also, institutions many require reporting as part of a system of internal checks and balances, so the practice is not uncommon and, in some situations, can be integrated with relative ease.

The informant was briefly consulted to develop an idea of what popular software has previously been used by writing centres. To supplement this, a web search for online tutoring software was conducted. These efforts identified at least three proprietary platforms that are in use by writing centres today: Accutrack, Tutortrac, and WCOline. The primary goal of Accutrack is to provide institutions with scheduling and appointment functionality. Much the same, Tutortrac is also branded as a scheduling and appointment system, with the ability to email users about upcoming workshops or appointments, and is integrated on various mobile devices. But for the greatest functionality offered professionally, WCOline is a

clear leader. This software provides most everything a centre needs to start tutoring online. In addition to scheduling and a slew of reporting abilities, this site also allows centres to conduct tutoring online both asynchronously and synchronously. In the case of improving a centre's ability to understand student needs, these types of software can be useful for reporting on sessions.

Professional software can be great for writing centres that are just starting out and don't have the necessary resources to provide themselves with a reporting or scheduling system, which many of the professional services offer. It should be noted that some of these platforms are proprietary and not ideally developed to consider needs analysis; but, some may offer the ability to customise the interface.

Some centres, however, are availed by bigger budgets, skilled professionals (such as a web designer or computer programmer), and other developmental benefits. These centres have an option to create and maintain their own in-house software, which can double as a tutoring and reporting platform. Assuming that someone is employed who is trained in or capable of developing software, in-house platforms can allow a centre to completely customise their online environment, opening up many doors for needs analysis. Centres that use in-house software are a case for deeper investigation, but with the limitless design capabilities of websites and so much freedom given to in-house software developers, it stands that custom software will be more likely and able to create an asynchronous tutoring system that is more apt to cater to the needs of its students, before, during, and after tutoring occurs. Custom software differs from the aforementioned professional software (excluding WCOOnline) in that it is developed by writing centre professionals, or people who are in consultation with

a writing centre. In turn, custom software be better tuned for effective use in a writing centre context.

Participants were questioned the use of professional tutoring software and custom in-house reporting software. Certainly, the responses to these questions indicated that a majority of writing centres are making use of professional or custom developed software at least for the purposes of reporting on their sessions. Making up 57% of total responses, one centre said they used Accutrack, three cited using Tutortrac, 12 used WCOonline, and 13 have developed their own in-house software. This is quite a revealing case, as it shows that the majority of participants in this study use software that can potentially be used to investigate and evaluate the needs of their students by use of reporting and, in the case of custom platforms, assignment submission systems that go beyond questionnaires.

The “Other” box for question nine pointed to software of other types that are used by the participants. For grammar and plagiarism checking, some centres rely on the use of Grammarly and Turnitin. These are free or paid services which automatically run a student’s text across a database of previously submitted work to both ensure the student is not plagiarising and check their work for grammatical mistakes. Services like these can be beneficial for tutoring in the sense that they can automatically expose issues that students are making. The pedagogical backing of these services is left for further research, but they may prove useful by discouraging plagiarism and tracking grammatical issues that students are facing over time, which could stand to be an extremely useful tool for asynchronous tutors. Lastly, Google Drive (previously Docs) was mentioned by participants. With this software, users can share files and allow others to edit or make

comments. An added advantage is that the document is saved online and can be viewed and worked on from anywhere that provides Internet access.

The case may be that writing centres are well on their way to making use of online software to improve their OWLs. Without question, some of the software mentioned has the potential to make great changes to the way writing centres can understand the needs of their students.

4.3 Asynchronous Tutoring Session Reporting

Reporting has had its place in online writing tutoring almost since its inception. Healy (1995) wrote about how the mixture of information technology and online tutoring methods presented a situation which had not occurred before: because all communication would be entered over some type of textual environment (like instant message or email), all online communications could be saved in a report. This was one of the first major topics that have come out of online tutoring discourse. Now, the uses of reporting have expanded, and writing centres can find many benefits to be gained. Indeed its uses can be beneficial to writing centres that need to show purpose for funding as well as be accountable to their institutions and students (Peters, 2006; Olson, 1984). While not all writing centres may report their sessions, it is important to investigate the ones who are, to see what kinds of information they are collecting. This section of the survey asks how many participants' centres report on their sessions, what types of information they collect, and whether or not tutors and students view reports after a session.

Participants were first asked whether or not their centre keeps online records of tutor and student communications. Without question, the results show a

major use of reporting throughout the writing centre community, with 41 respondents (80%) answering that their centre keeps records online. This is not particularly surprising, especially given the fact that an earlier question showed that some writing centres make use of professional online reporting software.

Keeping reports of asynchronous sessions can be hugely beneficial for writing centres who want to understand their students over time and be accountable for their service. Long (2005: 45) posits that student-teacher “diaries and logs...have the important advantage of preserving insider notions of what is relevant.” Reporting can divulge a tremendous amount of information regarding the students learning, as input to a report can be given by both tutors and students in an asynchronous environment. Long (2005: 45) argues that some disadvantages of this method are its time-consuming nature and analytical difficulty, but these do not apply here with the same consequence.

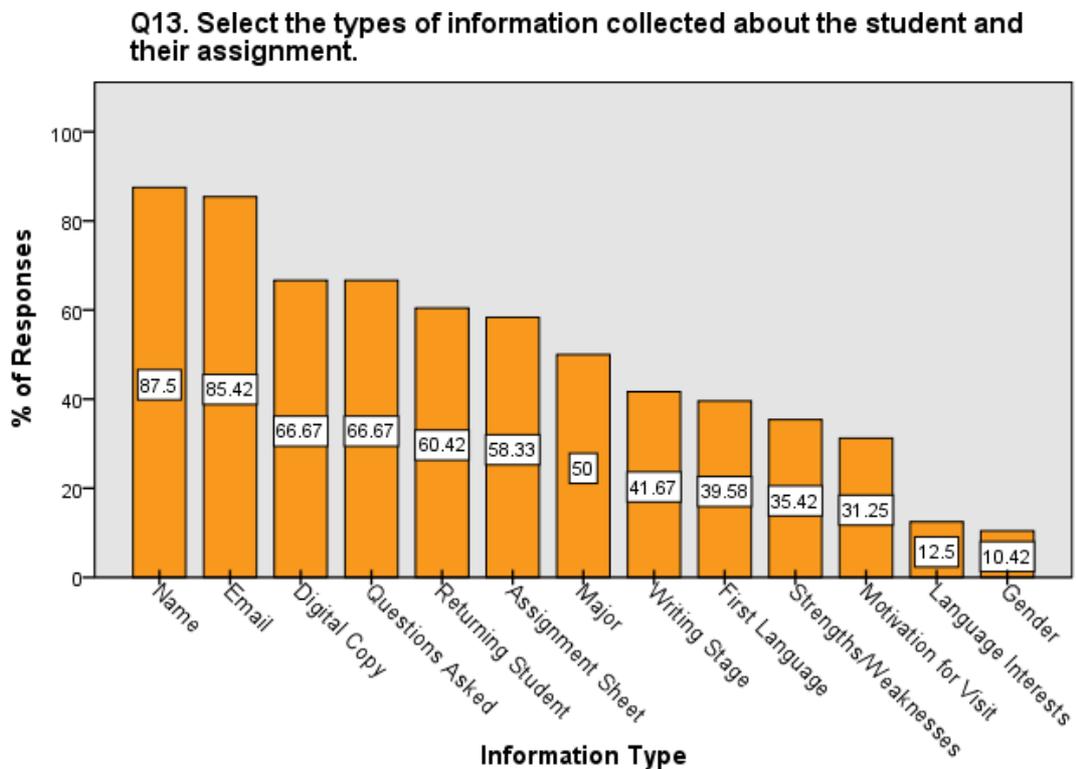
Online databasing systems are extremely efficient and nicely complemented by their propensity to elicit data sets that are relatively easy to manage and analyse, with the proper tools. Salt Lake Community College’s online reporting system is a good example of how reporting can be made effective by using online databases. For in-centre sessions, tutors log-in to the school’s custom reporting software, simply enter the student’s ID number into a search box, and suddenly all of the student’s information populates the report page. The tutor simply has to fill out a few additional tick boxes and comment areas that specifically pertain to the new session. For online submissions, there is a queue that collects all the synchronous and asynchronous submissions in a window for tutors; the report is already made; tutors need only open the report, fill out the few

necessary details, and save it under their name. Within minutes, tutors can have a sizeable report that includes any information that was automatically collected about the student during their submission (e.g., name, class, instructor, questions, concerns, due date, strengths, weakness, and so on), the tutor's reflection of the session, the areas of language that were focused on, along with any other aspect the writing centre wants to collect.

Reports can contain extremely valuable information regarding the student's context. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 55-58) present a very basic understanding of target-based needs using three terms, *necessities*, *lacks*, and *wants*, which writing centres can directly apply to the types of information they collect in their reports. Necessities are things that must be learned in the target-situation; for writing centres, these would be found in course syllabuses, assignment sheets, exercise instructions, or anywhere that task-related information can be found. Lacks are deduced by looking at what a student knows versus what they need to know to be successful. When tutors are filling out their reports at Salt Lake Community College, lacks are sometimes identified naturally, as tutors use a method of reflection to talk about their sessions; for example, a tutor might write in a report that they "noticed that the writer had issues with MLA citation and so spent a few minutes talking about that." And wants are seen through the scope of the student; what do they want to learn? For asynchronous tutoring submissions, questionnaires can be used to ask the students what their questions or concerns are for their assignment when they submit it for tutoring online. This is valuable needs-based data which can be saved in the report. There are many ways to collect information about students both explicitly and implicitly, but what kind of

information are writing centres interested in?

Needs analysis is based on the collection of many types of information and is highly effective when using triangulated sources and methods (Long, 2005: 28-30). So, the more information acquired about a particular learner or learning situation, the more opportunity a tutor may have in assessing any related needs. Question 13 was developed in order to see what kinds of information writing centres are interested in collecting, and to, again, expand on a basic list that was hypothesised as representing important types of information for writing centres. For this section, three participants did not know whether or not the centre used reporting, and did not provide any answers for this section. They were not included in analyses for this section (n=48).



Graph 2: Information types collected by writing centres

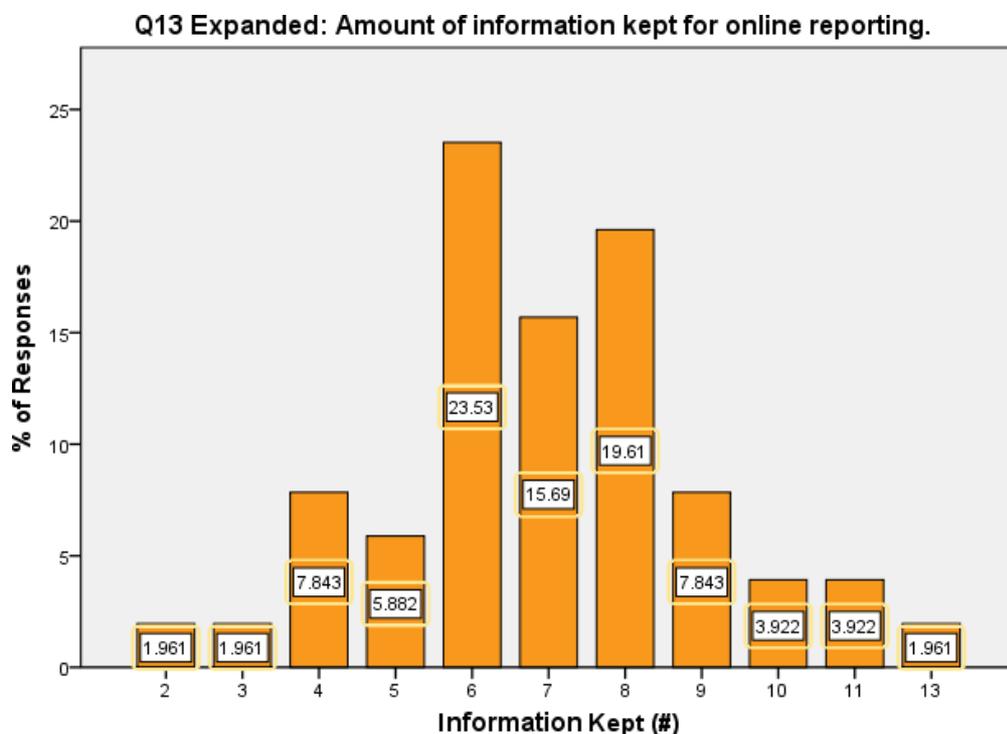
Here we can see what kinds of information are important for writing

centres to collect. Perhaps it goes without argument that the left half of the graph can be thought of as basic or fundamental needs in asynchronous tutoring practice, and that is why they are highly rated. But what's more interesting is what centres don't collect, especially with regards to language learning theory and gauging needs. For instance, the only item that does not appear on this graph, yet was included in the questionnaire, is age. Not one participant in the study responded as saying their centre collected age related information. The study of age in second language acquisition has been evolving well since the late 1960s, and has seen developed a plethora of strategies regarding theories about how adults learn a second language (Larsen-Freeman et al., 1991: 155-163). Seeing as 40% of responses indicate the collection of first language, it is fair to say that 40% see ESL students in some capacity. On some level, it would be useful for writing centres to use age-related data in conjunction with adult learning theories to more effectively engage students. In previous research under the scope of second language learning, age can be seen linked to crucial aspects of the process, such as motivation and satisfaction (Moyer, 2004: 139). Clearly, benefits can be gained by combining a knowledge of adult language learning styles with an understanding of a student's relative age. Even if it means asking the student whether they are between the ages of 21-25, 26-30, and so on, knowing the age of a person can drastically change how they perceive the writing centre, what language they want from it, and how they are able to acquire that language. There are further implications for specified tutor training in the case of a centre that has a wide age range.

As with most other questions in the survey, participants were given an

“Other” box to say more about the types of information they collect. The other types of information that were mentioned are: student’s written perception of the assignment, resources used or supplied, progress made since last visit, number of pages reviewed, name of course and instructor, whether or not English is a second language, length of time spent on a session, citation style used, student enrolment status, email communications from beginning to end of session, year of study, instructor’s email, and due date.

To view a better perspective of how participants responded to the question of information collection, the data can be expressed to show how many pieces of data were selected per participant. Given that some participants included more types of information collected by using the “Other” box, the total number of information points kept was recalculated and evaluated across all participant selections. From this an average number of collected information can be seen.



Graph 3: Number of pieces of information saved for reporting

Most centres collect between six and eight pieces of information (n=48). But realistically, it is difficult to say whether or not this number is substantial. Keeping in mind that some types of information collected are things like the student's name, due date, instructor's name, and other information not directly linked to what will be discussed throughout the session, it is difficult to believe that six to eight pieces of information would be considered a significant preliminary needs analysis. Regardless of the writing centre, a greater effort to collect data is going to result in a clearer understanding of any student.

The final questions on the reporting page sought to discover how tutors and students use the reports after they have been created. What is the point of information-rich reporting if little use is made of it? Participants were asked about the nature of students and tutors viewing previously reported sessions. It is assumed that viewing these reports is standard for some centres, and not for others. First, participants were given a 4-point likert scale to rate the frequency that tutors in their centre view previous reports before a session with a returning student. For the most part, responses could be seen as expected, with 13 (25%) saying "Always," 20 (40%) answering "Often," 15 (29%) responding "Rarely," and three (6%) selecting "Don't Know." It is nice to see that no participant selected "Never." This suggests at least a modicum of understanding that reports are valuable resources in asynchronous tutoring and the need to use them to inform future sessions is important to the community.

On the student side of things, the outcome was not as hopeful. When asked if students are able to view previously reported sessions, many centres appear not as supportive. 24 participants (47%) said they did not allow students to view

reports, 19 (37%) said they do, and eight (16%) did not know. It is somewhat surprising that this is the case, seeing as writing centre reports have so much potential information to offer students about themselves. It could be the case that some centres simply don't have the resources set up to provide students with a place to see their records. Not all tutoring platforms may have the functionality of allowing students to have accounts. Perhaps some centres have no additional notes in the report that the student does not already know about. Or maybe some centres are so concerned about data protection that they are not willing to risk developing an account system for students. It must be said, however, that centres which do not allow students to view their own records are missing out on a major contribution that reports can make to learning. Although, one must consider the nature of asynchronous tutoring and that students are essentially receiving a response from the tutor that they can go back and read as many times as they want.

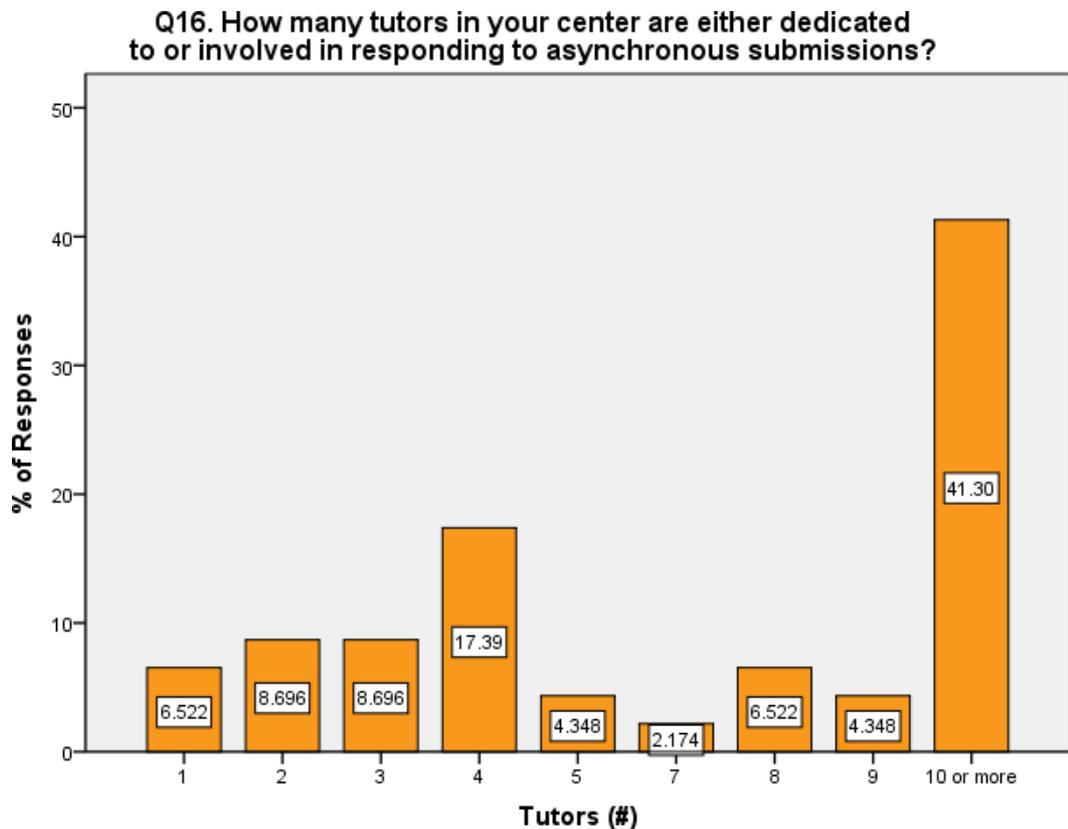
Reporting is a crucial aspect of asynchronous writing tutoring. Efforts must be made to collect as much pertinent and relevant information about a student and their assignment. This information is fundamental to conducting needs analysis and can provide a great deal of insightful knowledge to both tutors and students. There seems to be a general proficiency among writing centres in the field of reporting; however, it stands that much more could be done in terms of the amount and breadth of information that is collected and reported. Additionally, it is clear that writing centres need a way for students to view their progress.

4.4 Size, Satisfaction, Protocol, and Methodology

The survey concludes with a focus on the size of centres based on their

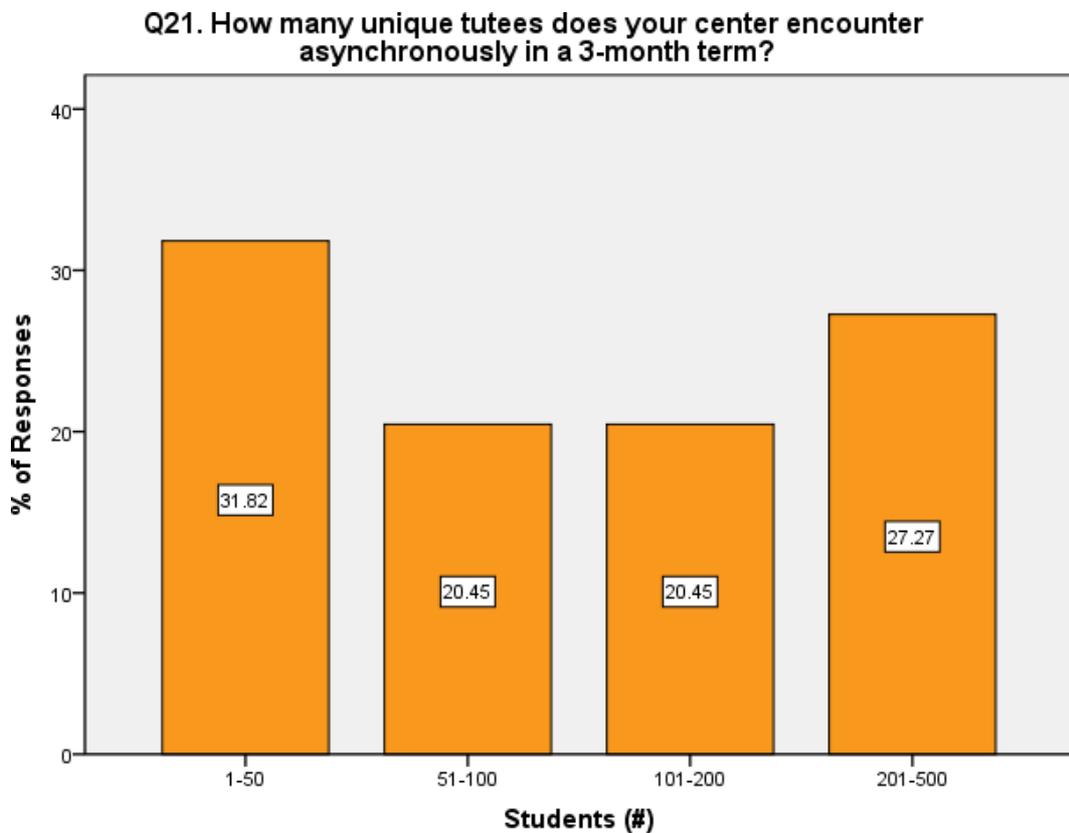
tutor and student numbers, student satisfaction, tutor training methods, and the protocols used when responding to students. Of paramount interest is to look at the methods in which tutors are being trained for asynchronous communications. Tutoring roles in themselves are interesting, but how are centres dealing with the tutor-student relationship online? First, an image of tutor and student numbers.

Questions 16 and 21 concerned the number of tutors working at the centres and the number of students seen per 3-month term, respectively. The “Don’t Know” option was selected five times for question 16, and seven times for question 21. This data was excluded when totalling the percentages for Graph 4 and 5. Additionally, one person responded in an “Other” comment box that they saw over 1000 unique students per term. This indicates that the surveying tool was partially inadequate for the sample group.



Graph 4: Number of tutors employed by writing centres

Concerning the number of tutors employed by a centre for the purposes of responding to asynchronous tutoring submissions, 19 participants (41%) reported between one to four, eight (17%) said between five and nine, and 19 (41%) responded that their centre employs ten or more (n=46). Again these responses reflect the different shapes, sizes, and capabilities of writing centres. However, a look at student numbers shows an interesting feature (n=44).



Graph 5: A measure of students seen per 3-month term

When asked how many students are seen per 3-month term, 14 participants (31%) selected 1-50, 9 participants (21%) each selected 51-100 and 101-200, and 201-500 was selected for 12 responses (27%). By combining the lower three groups, it can be seen that 73% of responses indicate seeing 1-200 students per term, while 27% see 201-500 students.

This seems as an oddity considering that 41% of responses indicated employing 10 or more tutors. This contrast could be due to at least a few reasons: different centres allow each tutor to spend a different amount of time on a session, so the rate of session completion can vary; while there could be 10 or more tutors involved in responding to asynchronous sessions, all of them may not be dedicated online tutors; and, as mentioned, the survey tool may have caused complications for some participants. Although, this relationship suggests that there can be significant work flow differences from centre to centre. Certainly, differences do exist within writing centres that push them to operate uniquely.

Regardless of the different practices held by writing centres, one function they all must consider in some capacity is evaluation. Institutions far and wide rely on evaluation to better understand the successes of their efforts, and while writing centres are no different in this regard, previous research notes the historical difficulty with writing centre evaluations producing credible evidence pertaining to the “success” of sessions (Thonus, 2002). This leads many centres to use measuring tools like satisfaction surveys to better understand how the centre is performing (Jones, 2001). With the advent of online surveying software—like SurveyMonkey used in this dissertation—performing satisfaction surveys can be relatively quick, cost-effective, and easy for asynchronous writing centres.

This study asked participants to comment on whether or not they collected satisfaction surveys. 32 participants (63%) acknowledged that their centre conducts these surveys, 13 (25%) reported that their centre did not collect, and six (12%) did not know. This alone is quite revealing. A fourth of writing centres are not making use of an evaluative tool that has the potential to alert them to issues

that may be compromising the value of their service. Satisfaction surveys don't have to be simple questionnaires only using likert scales; at Salt Lake Community College, respondents are asked about their understanding of the topics discussed and whether or not the tutor answered their questions sufficiently, then provided with an opportunity to write out reflective comments about the session. The value of these surveys is apparent. Centres that do not collect them are missing out on information that can improve their service and better their understanding of needs.

The 63% who did report collecting satisfaction surveys were asked to give an estimate average of the level of student satisfaction at their centre. Three of these participants were not able to provide a rating and were removed from the analysis. So, of 29 responses that cite collecting surveys, 20 (69%) claim their students are "Very Satisfied" and nine (31%) claim students are "Extremely Satisfied." While these numbers are based on an participants' unscientific judgements, it does reflect a notion about satisfaction surveys which suggests respondents will simply check the most positive responses as to complete the survey quickly while leaving a good image on the individual or entity being evaluated. It would not be a surprise if this was occurring with asynchronous tutoring satisfaction surveys, which is to reinforce the importance of employing various strategies and techniques when surveying students. There is much interesting and descriptive qualitative information that can be gained from satisfaction surveys.

The last topics covered in the survey pertain to the methodology and protocols used by the participants and centres surveyed. These findings are hoped to provide insight into what theories and pedagogies are being practised in the

asynchronous writing tutoring community, as well as the strategies that writing centres use to accomplish their job successfully.

Participants were directly asked whether or not there are specific training methods used for their centre's asynchronous tutors, and whether or not specific protocols are used when responding to students. Regarding the former topic, 30 participants (59%) said that their centre did use specific methods for training. In turn, responses to the latter topic indicate that 32 participants (63%) report that their centre used specific protocols when responding to students. For each topic, participants were given an open comment box and asked to describe the methods and protocols they used. This is a crucial step to investigating how and if writing centres are using methods of needs analysis. Certainly, as described in the introduction, much literature exists to lay out the features and functions of OWLs. Many centres use these resources to structure and operate their service, so it may be of benefit to look for any hints of needs analysis among them.

Protocols may be used in writing centres to direct the work of tutors, and are important to investigate to understand what tutors write about in their email responses. When asked to describe the protocols used at their centre, 22 participants' answers could be seen as containing valid and relevant information. Some answered, for example, that submissions should be returned within 24 or 48 hours, but these types of answers were disregarded, as the question specifically asked about protocols used while a tutor is responding to a submission. Many types of answers were given, but to create a summary view of the situation, it was decided by the researcher to organise participant responses into two groups which seemed to appear in the response data anyway: centres that use templates to

respond, and those that don't. Of the 22 participants who provided valid information on the topic of protocol use, ten (45%) stated that their centre uses some form of template response, whether it be a list of sections that must be included in the response, or an actual standardised template. Templates may have benefits for centres that want to standardise their responses and make sure that students are getting relatively the same service as everyone else. However, unless the template is specifically constructed to make use of the information collected before the session about the student's needs (as described above), it is likely that the tutor will not be able to address a student's issues as effectively as a tutor who can look at the submission in whole and comment on issues that the student mentioned when submitting their assignment for tutoring.

The other 12 participants (55%) essentially conveyed that the tutor has the creative freedom to respond to the student as they see fit, with a few caveats. Some centres required these types of responses to include a disclaimer of what services the centre provides, while others cited a need for tutors to respond in a non-directive way that would not predispose them to make edits or corrections to the paper. Non-directive tutoring has been a very popular approach taken throughout the community and stems from mid-20th century psychological philosophy where a counsellor extrapolates information from their patient by asking questions which elicit information already known by the patient (Boquet,1999).

Indeed, the directive versus non-directive discussion is on-going among writing centres and has many viewpoints (Clark, 2001). But non-directive methods do have something to offer needs analysis. By asking questions that

guide the student to an answer already existent within themselves, the tutor simultaneously tries to clarify any unclear/incorrect passages while giving the student a chance to learn through introspective means (or more clearly: having to answer the tutor's question without any additional communication from the tutor aside from the email response). An example from Ascuna and Kiernan (2008) illustrates this event:

“Do you mean granite (like the type of rock) or
granted (like it is assumed by most people)?”

The tutor attempts to clarify what the student is intending to say, and in doing so provides a learning opportunity to notice the differences between the two similarly sounding words. It is likely that the student is aware of both “granite” and “granted” and, with the definitions included, able to make an educated choice of which to use. In this example, the tutor invites the student to take action while clarifying their needs (what they are intending to say); this is non-directive tutoring.

An insightful notion about how protocols can be used came from one participant who commented that, when writing email responses, tutors “talk about previous submissions to make a connection if the work has been submitted before” [sic]. This is an insightful comment showing exactly how needs analysis can be practised in asynchronous writing tutoring. So much of the task of asynchronous tutoring seems to be embedded in this one participant's notion of making “a connection.” To be sure, conducting needs analysis is an on-going effort of educational system to make connections between students and their learning goals. A great deal of what a tutor does is to focus students on issues and

share valuable resources with them. As this participant's comment exhibits, asynchronous tutoring protocols can involve characteristics of a needs analysis.

In a final effort to better understand OWL practices and theories, participants were surveyed on the use of methodology in the writing centre, particularly in the sense of additional training that tutors are given to tutor online. The study of method and methodology has developed into a landscape of divided theories and opposing perspectives (Bell, 2003) and it is important that such ideas are classified appropriately. Methodology, as regarded by Richards and Rodgers (2001: 170), can be seen as the strategies which exist at "the center of...teaching philosophy" [sic]. What they intend to say is that methodology can be a mixture of strategies, theories, and principles that fuel the teaching environment. In another interpretation, Oller (1993: 3) lists many types of documents and actions that can be regarded as methods (e.g., procedures, materials, manners of interaction, and so on). In this view, methods are the bits and pieces of actual teaching practice that are used in the teaching environment. In this study, participants were questioned on the methodologies that can be used in and applied to various stages of asynchronous writing tutoring. However, many participants' responses could be considered as methods, the particular strategies that are used by these participants and their centres. Both methods and methodology will be evaluated in this final section of the analysis.

Out of the 30 participants who supplied answers, 20 responded with valid ideas that relate to either methods or methodologies. Looking at the methods mentioned, it isn't so clear that writing centres are training their tutors to overtly consider student needs in an asynchronous environment; these are some methods

mentioned by participants for which their centre provides additional training: software and technology use, tone and attitude in writing, non-directive response, modelling, and giving holistic/conversational responses. There were two responses which mentioned the needs of two specific groups, adults and non-native speakers of English. However, these—and many of the other examples of methods given in the survey—can be seen as concerns that all writing centres share in their practice. Aside from some technological concerns, like considering attitude in an email or how to use a centre’s online service, there are very little findings of methods that are already being used by writing centres to understand student needs. This is not a surprising result and is a clear indicator of the distance which has existed between writing centres and needs analysis. In turn, the urgency to develop the needs analysis discussion among writing centre professionals could not be any more present.

However, one respondent did provide an example of a “method”—although it is more of an educational theory—that may improve a centre’s ability to gauge needs: transactional distance. Moore (1993) elaborates on this theory, which can be used when working in distance education settings. Three key terms come out of Moore’s analysis: dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy. He suggests that the structure of a transactionally distant programme “describes the extent to which an education programme can accommodate or be responsive to each learner’s individual needs.” It is here, however, where Moore departs from the topic of needs. In describing the development of course materials, he suggests that it takes the efforts of a team of people to understand how learner autonomy can be considered, although there is no explicit clarification of how a programme

can go about doing this. Transactional distance is an important topic for OWLs to consider and does in fact point towards a better understanding of learner needs in relation to their autonomy. Although, in Moore's text, how to gain this understanding seems to fall on the individual centre to discern.

Eight participants responded to this part of the survey with what could be considered methodologies. Five of the eight participants cited in-house developed materials as being a primary source of a guiding methodology. One participant noted that their tutors take a 6-week course on college-level reading and learning (CRLA certification). Another commented that their training focuses on the amount and type of feedback given. And a few other in-house methodology users said new tutors go through a process of observing senior tutors in order to better understand the role. There were no detailed descriptions of the in-house methods used by these participants. Yet, still, the topics mentioned here seem to apply in some way to many writing centres, and not additional methodological training needed to work online or that which directly improves the capacity to conduct needs analysis.

The final section of the responses concerning methodologies may provide some better insights as to how writing centres use methodologies as all-encompassing perspectives, which Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest they may be. Three perspectives of methodology were mentioned that the researcher considered to be actual methodologies: social constructivism, Lerner and Gillespie, and Hewett. As mentioned in the introduction, social constructivism is a methodology that became popular with writing centres that wanted to break from traditional teacher-centred learning styles and instead create a communal space

where ideas can be shared by two able-minded individuals, tutor and student (Bruffee, 1984). In asynchronous writing tutoring, this methodology can be linked to non-directive response, as described above, and the general notion that tutors attempt to communicate *with* students, not *to* them. The goal here is to create a learning environment that is conducive to introspection, free expression, and the exchange of ideas.

Lerner and Gillespie, and Hewett were also mentioned in the introduction as having created guides pertaining to the methods used to developing a successful OWL and/or practising effective online writing tutoring. Indeed, Lerner and Gillespie's book, *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* (2008), has been a valuable read for writing centres. However, the book primarily covers themes that have been long discussed throughout the writing centre community: depictions of the writing and tutoring process, developing resources as a writing centre or tutor, working with ESL students, understanding student expectations (which may sound like "needs," but is a topic that generally describes the common situation where students believe the writing centre is a place to get their paper "fixed"), and so on.

Hewett has been studying online communicative technologies for at least a decade, and is a very knowledgeable source for online tutoring on the whole. Her latest book, *The Online Writing Conference* (2010), provides a plethora of strategies and techniques for tutoring online, for both writing instructors and writing centre tutors. To be sure, Hewett offers somewhat more than other sources in the search for more effective needs analysis. Chapter Eight, in her book, describes two methods that tutors could use keep up on their students' progress after a session: interactive journals and spontaneous or scheduled chats.

Journalling has been described in this dissertation previously under the notion of keeping detailed reports, and will not be described here. Conducting spontaneous or scheduled chats with students online is a good strategy, although it is inconsistent with the scheme of a writing centre conducting their work asynchronously. However, these chats could provide an opportunity for the student to ask questions about topics they were unsure about after having received feedback from their tutor. This strategy may best work in smaller centres that do not have such large student to tutor ratios.

As this section of the study shows, writing centres come in all shapes and sizes, and use various types of methods and methodologies. This is an indicator of some of the challenges writing centres face in developing an overarching system of understanding student needs. Some methods—such as non-directive response and journalling—can be used by any centre wishing to improve their needs analysis effort. Although, care must be taken, for example, when it comes to selecting methods that are best suited for the centre and their chosen approach to asynchronous tutoring. And, as discussed, funding, personnel, space, and technological capability are always an aspect to consider when creating a system of needs analysis. The methodologies of Lerner and Gillespie, and Hewett, were acknowledged in the introduction as effective ways an OWL can conduct its work effectively. However, these resources are lacking substance and depth when it comes to explaining a process of conducting needs analysis in asynchronous environments.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Developing a Model

Needs analysis is a widely beneficial educational tool that, historically, aided the development of ESP/EAP syllabuses. Over time, researchers and educators worked to expand the understanding of needs themselves, which gave way to the innovation of many new strategies for realizing needs of all different kinds. With a mission of helping students become better writers, it is imperative that writing centres make use of needs analysis in order to not only expand the range of information gathered about students' needs, but also better position tutors to be able to address these needs. Asynchronous tutoring platforms have characteristically presented educators with challenges to overcome when attempting to derive student needs. And, in recent studies, there have been no overt efforts to understand methods of needs analysis in the writing centre.

This dissertation has synthesised the aforementioned topics for the purposes of providing writing centres with a model of needs analysis, while drawing attention to both the need for and importance of using needs analysis in writing centres, specifically in asynchronous settings. The lack of literature on this subject called for an empirical study of writing centres to investigate the methods were already being used to identify student needs. With the aid of an informant, a thorough questionnaire was developed. Based on the results, this dissertation describes four topics that may be used to develop a model of how writing centres can develop their needs analysis efforts: using custom online asynchronous platforms, collecting more and varied information, using reports educationally, and effectively training and positioning tutors to conduct needs analysis.

5.2 Using Custom Online Asynchronous Platforms

The study revealed that, along with standard communicative platforms like email, web forums, and classroom management systems, writing centres are increasingly using custom software for their online tutoring platforms. These types of platforms exhibit some exciting features and can allow students and tutors to interact in an environment where they are surrounded by information relevant to the context of the session. While advanced uses of these custom platforms do require the need of a computer programmer, the benefits to efficiency, accessibility, and consistency cannot be outweighed. Writing centres that have the ability should consider the development of a custom platform that collects information which is complementary to their specific group of tutors and students. With creativity and experimentation, writing centres can develop platforms that improve the quality and amount of the information they collect.

5.3 Collecting More and Varied Information

Collecting more and varied information is, potentially, the best way to improve the needs analysis effort of any online tutoring program. As this study has shown, writing centres could be collecting more and varied information about their students, and this is an imperative. With in-person tutoring sessions, there is no boundary to the number of questions a tutor can ask a student in order to clarify information, gain a better understanding of the student's assignment, and so on. However, this luxury is, by nature, removed from asynchronous tutoring; the tutor has no recourse to clarify information once the student has submitted their work. It

goes without saying that with a greater effort to collect information about the student and their work, tutors will be able to respond with more effective and directed feedback. And by using a custom online platform, writing centres will find that collecting a substantial amount of information is simply a matter of imagination and necessity.

5.4 Using Reports Educationally

Reports can be used as educational tools when students are given an opportunity to see them, as these documents can include a wide range of details pertaining to the session. As discussed here and throughout previous literature (e.g., Long 2005), reports can be a major contributor to understanding student needs. They give a snapshot of the student's learning context, which in itself contains many aspects that both tutors and students can use to improve their communication. Tutors, for example, can look at a student's past reports and immediately have an idea of the student's needs, lacks, and wants. On the other hand, reports provide a meta-learning opportunity for students where they can see what their writing centre has reported about their tutoring session, what areas of language were focused on, and so on.

5.5 Effectively Training and Positioning Tutors to Conduct Needs Analysis

The effort to derive needs asynchronously extends to tutors. With strategies like the non-directive approach, tutors can subtly clarify a student's

needs while effectively presenting them with a learning opportunity. Although some students may not take the time to email their tutor regarding questions stemming from a non-directive approach (as well as the fact that non-directive questions may be rhetorical), the opportunity for further dialogue and understanding of needs becomes existent when a tutor makes the effort to improve clarity or obtain more information by asking questions.

Furthermore, writing centres have an on-going responsibility to provide their tutors with the most up-to-date training in terms of the assignments they may be confronted with. While this may be an onerous task for some centres, the need can clearly be seen in the apparentness that a tutor will best be able to respond to a student with access to an assignment sheet or course syllabus. But, considering that this study found that just over half of participants surveyed cited that their centre collects the student's assignment sheet, it may be that tutors do not always have access to these materials. However, as discussed in Lerner and Gillespie (2008: 27), writing centres that employ tutors from a range of disciplines allows them to provide effective feedback for a range of disciplines.

For example, if a student were to submit a paper for their U.S. History course, it is fitting that—assuming the resources are there—the student should receive feedback from an informed tutor, who has taken that course before, as opposed to an uninformed tutor, who has not. This mere positioning automatically boosts the likeliness that tutor will better be able to understand the student's needs, having already gone through that course. This is not to say that an informed tutor will be better able to provide students with ideas and content related information. Although this could be the case, any tutor in a position to do so should consider

the limit to which they influence the student's ideas. Instead, it can be seen that an informed tutor will be in a better position to guide the session, barring they understand the assignment better than a uninformed tutor.

It is hoped that these ideas will spur further discussion about how writing centres and their OWLs can develop strategies to understand students' needs. The study of needs analysis is an example to educators everywhere that recognising the context of a learning situation is not as easy as it may seem. In fact, as this study has shown, writing centres are conducting needs analysis, and so it is important that the writing centre community begin to improve its methods of needs analysis. A legitimate needs analysis looks at a learning situation from many perspectives, and can be a costly and time-consuming process, but there is much educational opportunity to be gained from them. And with asynchronous tutoring environments already losing so much, having been removed from the, traditionally, physical context of tutoring, improving the educational opportunities of the service should be of paramount interest.

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Appendices

1 Questionnaire Used in the Survey

Introduction and Your Information

Needs analysis (NA) is a significant field of study in second-language learning. Traditionally, it has been used to gauge the needs of classroom-based teaching in order to prepare an appropriate syllabus for use with a group of particular learners. For example, a foreign business English course may use a questionnaire sheet to understand what exact parts of language the learners are interested in and need. This survey intends both to peer through the scope by which the writing center community views NA, and to better understand methods that are currently being used to conduct NA.

Specifically, this study focuses on NA as used in asynchronous (e-mail/CMS) online writing tutoring. Unlike in-person/phone/web-video sessions, where those involved may communicate freely, asynchronous online sessions present a barrier of contact -- regarding preliminary learning needs -- that must be confronted in order for the tutor and tutee to communicate meaningfully. Additionally, online data forms can be quite similar to traditional NA questionnaire sheets, which presents an opportunity to investigate where writing center NAs and traditionally course-based NAs overlap or differ.

All questions are optional. Thank you for your participation.

1. Name:

2. E-mail:

3. Position:

4. Institution Name:

5. Institution Type (Carnegie Classifications):

Doctorate-granting University
Baccalaureate Colleges
Special Focus Institution
High School
Elementary School

Master's College/University
Associate's College (2-year College)
Tribal College
Middle School
Community Writing Center

Asynchronous Approach

6. Does your center use asynchronous tutoring?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

7. Select the types of asynchronous tutoring your center provides:

- E-mail
- Classroom Management Systems (Blackboard, Canvas, etc)
- Web Board/Forum
- Other (please specify)

8. Select the genres your center supports:

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Blog Entries | Individual Questions | Poetry |
| Cover Letters | Journals | Resumes |
| Essays | Multimedia | Scholarship Writing |
| Fiction | Online Portfolios | |
| Other (please specify) | | |

9. Is any professional tutoring software used by your writing center?

- No
- Accutrack
- Tutortrac
- WOnline
- Don't Know
- Other (please specify)

10. Does your center use in-house, custom built software for reporting?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

11. If your center uses in-house software, please provide a web link (if it is public) or email a screenshot of the submission page to j.c.mccormick@durham.ac.uk.

Reporting

12. Does your center keep online records of tutor-tutee communications?

Yes

No

Don't Know

13. Select the types of information collected about the student and their assignment.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Age | First Language | New or Returning Tutee |
| Areas of Language Interest | Gender | Stage of Writing |
| Assignment Sheet or Info | Major | Tutee Questions |
| Digital Copy of the Writing | Motivation for | Writing Strengths or |
| Email | Submission | Weaknesses |
| | Name | |

Other (please specify)

14. Tutors use previously reported sessions to inform upcoming sessions/responses.

Always

Often

Rarely

Never

Don't Know

15. Are students able to view previously reported sessions?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Tutor Response

16. How many tutors in your center are either dedicated to or involved in responding to asynchronous submissions?

17. Do tutors receive additional training for asynchronous tutoring?

Trained

Untrained

Don't Know

18. If tutors are trained, in what methodology/pedagogy?

19. Are tutors required to follow specific protocols when responding in asynchronous sessions?

Yes

No

Don't Know

20. If response protocols are used, please describe them briefly.

Tutee Involvement

21. How many unique tutees does your center encounter asynchronously in a 3-month term?

1-50, 51-100, 101-200, 201-500, Don't Know

22. Does your writing center conduct asynchronous satisfaction surveys?

Yes

No

Don't Know

23. If satisfaction surveys are collected, do tutees feel they receive the guidance that they came to the center for?

Extremely Satisfied Very Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Not Satisfied Don't Know

This is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your participation!

2 Ethics Monitoring Form

English Language Centre Research Ethics Monitoring and Approval Form

Ethical consideration and approval is required for learning, teaching and research activities where ethical issues are identified, for example work involving human participants, animals or environmental impact. Within the English Language Centre, activities involving human participants and their data (such as interviews or surveys) are likely to be the primary focus of ethical review. This form is intended to gather information about proposed research projects by MA students, students involved in preparatory courses and members of academic related staff for which ethical approval might be required. It should be completed if you have identified any ethical issues in relation to your proposed research project (e.g. collection and use of personal data). If you are unsure whether or not your application requires ethical approval, please contact the Research Office and the Department's Ethics Representative, Philip Nathan

- Academic-related staff engaged in professional research involving ethical issues, whether or not external funding is being applied for should complete the form below and submit it to the Departmental Ethics Representative along with an outline (300 words max.) of the proposed research project at least six weeks before the proposed research activity is due to be carried out.
- MA Research Supervisors are responsible for identifying any ethical issues related to research activity by their relevant students and submitting or ensuring submission of the form to the Departmental Ethics Representative on the student's behalf. The form should be accompanied by an outline of the proposed dissertation/coursework assignments.

Name: Joseph McCormick

Category: PGT

Supervisor/Course Director: Philip Nathan

Course and/or Module: MA TESOL Applied Linguistics Dissertation

Title of project: The Values, Efficacy and Appropriateness of Needs Analysis Use in Asynchronous Writing Tutoring

Questionnaire

1. Where will the research take place?

* Note: when conducting or collaborating in research in other countries, Principal Investigators should comply with the legal and ethical requirements existing in the UK and in the countries where the research is being conducted.

The survey is sent to an open mailing list made up of writing centre professionals primarily in North America, as well as abroad.

2. What are the aims of the project?

To investigate the methods by which writing centres conduct online writing tutoring and consider notions of needs analysis.

3. How many participants are involved?

The survey is open to the entire mailing list; there are perhaps more than 3000 subscribers.

4. How will potential participants be identified?

In the write up, there will be no mention of individual writing centres or the participants who represent them, outside of the centre I have worked in.

5. What sort of data will be collected?

Page 1 – Personal information about the participant and their institution (name, email, position, institution type). This information is collected in order allow for the researcher to clarify any ambiguous or unclear data, as many important aspects of the survey are qualitative.

Page 2 – How they approach the asynchronous environment (types of platform used, types of assignments supported, use of custom software). This information is collected in part to weed out centres that do not operate within the confines of the study (one of which is that they must support asynchronous tutoring), as well as gain an understanding of the types of software used.

Page 3 – How the centres report their sessions (types of data collected, do tutors/students use past reports). This information is collected to better understand where writing centres may be conducting needs analysis.

Page 4 – How tutors are trained to respond (number of tutors, type of methodology and pedagogy used, if any). This information is collected to expose how writing centres are currently prepared to work with students asynchronously.

Page 5 – How many students are seen by the centre (number of students, response of satisfaction surveys). This information is to gauge centre size and relative satisfaction of the service.

6. Will you seek written or verbal consent from your informants regarding project participation and the use of any data that you might generate?

The survey states in the instructions that all of it is optional and the text of the email solicits their participation. They understand by submitting their answers, they are consenting to their data being used.

7. Will you give your informants a written summary of your project and the uses of any data that you might generate?

My name is [redacted] and I am currently working on my dissertation for the MA TESOL (Applied Linguistics) program at Durham University in Durham,

England. Also, I work as an online writing tutor at Salt Lake Community College's Student Writing Center and am one of the developers for its online tutoring program.

The topic of my dissertation is "The Values, Efficacy and Appropriateness of Needs Analysis Use in Asynchronous Writing Tutoring" and as part of this study I am conducting a survey on how writing centers approach asynchronous sessions and understand the needs of their students.

All questions are optional, and the survey should only take about 5 minutes. While I do ask for your personal information (again, optional) this is only so I may follow up for the sake of clarity.

8. Will data be anonymous?

YES/NO

NOTE: the provision of an information statement and verbal consent are suitable for informal interviews or surveys where no personal data is collected or the information is anonymous. For full interviews or surveys in which personal/sensitive/confidential data is collected both a written summary of the project and a written consent form is recommended (or an audio recording of the verbal consent process).

As mentioned earlier, personal data is collected for the sake of clarifying qualitative answers. After this point, this information will be discarded. In use for the write up, all data used will be anonymous.

9. Will the data be destroyed at the end of the study?

If the survey merits further review for topics of study by myself or my supervisor, the data will be kept. If not, it will be destroyed.

10. If NO, what will happen to the data after the end of the study?

It may be further examined for other research opportunities.

11. For how long will it be kept after the end of the study?

6 months to 1 year.

12. Will written consent for the use of data for the anticipated future research be obtained?

If characteristics of any further research require written consent.

13. Are there any other ethical issues arising from your project? If YES, please outline below.

Not to my knowledge.

Declaration

I have read:

1. The University's document on Ensuring Sound Conduct in Research
www.dur.ac.uk/resources/hr/policies/research/EnsuringSoundConductPolicy.pdf
and believe that my project complies fully with its precepts.

2. The Principles for Data Protection (Data Protection Act 1998)
http://www.dur.ac.uk/data.protection/dp_principles/

3. The Guidance for Research Using Personal Information
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/data.protection/100929ResearchDPAAdviceV1.3.pdf>

Signed: [redacted]

Date: 10-8-13