

6-25-2004

# Tutor Attitudes Toward Tutoring Creative Writers in Writing Centers

Leah F. Cassorla  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

## Scholar Commons Citation

Cassorla, Leah F., "Tutor Attitudes Toward Tutoring Creative Writers in Writing Centers" (2004). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.  
<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/986>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

Tutor Attitudes Toward Tutoring Creative Writers in Writing Centers

by

Leah F. Cassorla

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: James A. Inman, Ph.D.  
Joseph Moxley, Ph.D.  
Joyce Walker, Ph.D.  
Donna N. Sewell, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
June 25, 2004

Keywords: *creative writing, tutoring, training, writing center, tutor attitudes, survey*

© Copyright 2004, Leah F. Cassorla

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to gratefully acknowledge some of the people who helped make this thesis a reality. I cannot possibly acknowledge all those who deserve it, and I apologize for not being able to do so. I must, however, thank my mentors Drs. Donna Sewell and James Inman. Donna, for refusing to believe that I was “in it for the piece of paper.” James for asking me to maybe write a bit about one of my ideas. And both, for listening, reading, and critiquing. I would also like to thank a newly discovered colleague, Dr. Beth Hewett who took the time to listen and respond and exchange ideas. Her valuable input helped me find a way to express what I saw in these survey responses. I must also thank the writing center community, first for treating me as a professional in this field and then for taking the time to share their insights about the questions in this study. My committee has been very helpful to me in considering my own biases and definitions. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague, Sasha Normand, for dealing with my stress and talking me through much of my writing as well as any tutor could have. And finally, my sisters, Tamar Cassorla and Hadas Aguilar, who provided mathematical and emotional support.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<i>Intersection 1: A Meeting of Minds</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<b>Review of Literature</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<i>Intersection 2: Mutually Beneficial Tutoring</i> .....	<i>11</i>
<b>Methods and Methodology</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<i>Intersection 3: An Unexpected Creative Writer</i> .....	<i>21</i>
<b>Summary of Results</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<i>Intersection 4: Coming Full Circle</i> .....	<i>39</i>
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Appendix A: Survey Invitation</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix B: Flowchart of Survey</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>60</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Respondent Definitions: Defined in One Category.....	23
Figure 2: Respondent Definition: By Process.....	25
Figure 3: Respondent Definitions: By Genre.....	27
Figure 4: Respondent Definitions: Any Writing.....	30
Figure 5: Respondent Comfort: Creative Nonfiction.....	32
Figure 6 Respondent Comfort: Fiction. ....	33
Figure 7: Respondent Comfort: Poetry. ....	34
Figure 8: Training Issues: Training Tutors Have.....	35
Figure 9: Training Issues: Training Tutors Suggest. ....	37

## **ABSTRACT**

This study concerns itself with tutor attitudes toward tutoring creative writers in writing centers. In it, I look at these attitudes and compare tutor definitions of creative writing, tutor comfort with tutoring writers, and tutor training. Tutors' attitudes toward their training and their beliefs about what training to tutor creative writers should entail tell a great deal about the privileging of creative writing and creative writers in writing centers. This study is an important first step in considering that privileging, its source, and its effects.

For the study, tutors completed an online survey. They were not asked for any identifying information, and online software allowing the tracking of IP addresses and email addresses was disabled so that no identifying information could be collected.

It is my hope that this study will aid the writing center field in reconsidering the ways in which writing center theory and practice meet, and in constructing a better way to bring ideals and practice together. Because writing center tutors are in a unique position as frontline practitioners and reader/writers of writing center theory, understanding their attitudes is an important step towards lessening the gap between our ideals and our realities.

## Introduction

This project began as an informal survey of tutors<sup>1</sup> in my writing center (in a four-year regional university) to explore the possible connection between writing centers and creative writing<sup>2</sup>. The tutors, almost all of whom identified themselves as creative writers, were asked to consider their respective comfort levels with tutoring creative writers. Most responded that they would not be comfortable in tutorials with creative writers and expressed the worry that they did not have the skills required to help creative writers because these writers were working on “art.” At the time, we did not discuss what creative writing meant, and we only touched on what individual tutor fears and discomforts regarding these tutorials might be.

I decided to try working with creative writers to see if I could find tools or approaches that would help tutors feel comfortable tutoring creative writers. At the time, I focused on poets because the tutors in my writing center had said they felt they would be less comfortable tutoring poets than other kinds of creative writers. The tutors’ fears primarily centered on the emotional issues that could be attached to poetry and the forms poetry students were asked to write in. Yet, I found that the primary “tools” for working with poets was the same as tutoring other writers: ask questions, be flexible. This was no different than what I had been taught to do with any writer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Because there are many terms for the people who work with writers and their texts in writing centers, I will use tutor(s) interchangeably to indicate any person involved in any of the pedagogical activities of a writing center (including face-to-face, online synchronous, online asynchronous, one-to-one, and one-to-group).

<sup>2</sup> Though creative writing can be broadly defined, and is rapidly becoming more broadly defined, for the purpose of this study, the term identifies any combination of poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. However, because this study also seeks to measure how tutors define creative writing, there will be some discussion of differing definitions.

Having come to this conclusion, it occurred to me that if tutors are taught to tutor writers and not texts they should not feel the discomfort they expressed. I began to wonder if (and how) tutors were privileging creative writing. This privilege seemed to lie in tutors' beliefs that creative writing was art and therefore special. But this privilege also acts as a disadvantage to creative writers. Creative writers may be less likely to become writing center clients if they sense tutors' discomfort. Worse, they might not become clients if they are told that only one tutor can "handle" that or that there is a workshop offered but not one-on-one tutoring. The privileging of creative writing can also be a disadvantage to writing centers, keeping writers out and reinforcing the "fix-it shop" or "remedial workshop" attitudes of some of our colleagues. If we privilege creative writing, then the writing center model—in which all writers are equal and all writing is discussed—is fiction. I wanted to find out if creative writing *was*, in fact, privileged and if it was, why.

I decided to use the following as my orienting question: How do tutors feel about tutoring creative writers? To address this question, I created a survey, the results of which are presented here. I will consider three areas of tutor attitudes: how tutors define creative writing, the link (if any) between tutors' self-identification as creative writers and their attitudes toward tutoring creative writers, and tutor attitudes toward training for tutoring creative writers.

Since this project centers on the pliable concept of creative writing, this study also contains some pieces of narrative explaining my journey to and through this study. Those narratives are presented as intertexts between sections.



## Intersection 1: A Meeting of Minds

*The week I put my survey online, I announced it at the weekly meeting. I had already told my fellow tutors about my plans for my thesis and my research. I asked them to take the time to answer the survey, reminded them that it was completely anonymous and told them I would send each a copy of the URL by email. I expected that to be about it.*

*Of course, it wasn't. Instead, the survey sparked an involved conversation.*

*Because I had talked to all of my colleagues about the survey, I was not surprised at the general response. Some of us didn't feel comfortable with the idea of tutoring creative writers. But the concerns were not about whether they felt they were qualified. Rather, the concern was that tutors in general would not be qualified to tutor poetry. In fact, tutoring writers of fiction or creative non-fiction was not a concern at all for my colleagues. Perhaps because they are poets, their answers focused on the art of poetry.*

*I was told that there is a time in a poet's career at which she is most vulnerable and is looking for her voice. At that point, the poet might be damaged by advice innocently given by the tutor—advice about whom to read or about how to approach, for example, line breaks. This “damaging” advice might keep the writer from developing her voice, from moving into her genre, or from developing her originality to its fullest.*

*The conversation was intense, heated, and wonderful. We touched on what I consider to be essential questions for writing centers: If a student comes in with a poem for a class, should the tutor help him with his style or help him focus on the assignment? Are there types of writing tutors are not equipped to handle? Does it depend on the tutor's amount of education (i.e. is the tutor an undergraduate, a graduate, or a member of the faculty)? Should there be separate training for different kinds of writing? And if so, should there simply be different tutors for different areas of the curriculum?*

*All these questions and more became part of our conversation. We talked for far longer than I had expected we would. For me, the best part was that we didn't reach any consensus. We didn't all agree in the end. This left the discussion open for more exploration and knowledge-building. Yet, everyone seemed comfortable with that level of disagreement. We even continued the conversation, on and off, after the meeting, posing questions and situations, offering possible solutions, and learning from each other.*

*The conversation(s) helped me think through my assumptions in creating the survey. It helped me question my expectations and what I thought I knew about writing center pedagogy.*

## Review of Literature

Elizabeth Boquet's "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions" offers a useful framework through which to look at the development of writing centers, writing center methods, and writing center attitudes as well as the points of dissonance in writing center work and history. Boquet *starts* from the question of tensions in writing center history and method, working from writing center as in-class laboratory where teachers can intervene in students' writing habits to correct errors as they occur to the modern-day writing center (if such a center truly exists) in which tutors, often undergraduate tutors, work with writers through a method of questioning to assist them in reflecting on their writing.

Boquet's work is useful here because it can be used to trace some of the movements that have produced the few articles dealing with creative writing in the writing center. Though, as will be mentioned in Intersection 4, there was written mention of creative writing in writing labs as early as 1951—and perhaps even earlier—this study will primarily concern itself with what Boquet calls “post-open admissions,” (475) though she remarks that the actual time frame for such an era is difficult to truly define.

Boquet begins, however, with the in-class laboratory of the early twentieth century and swiftly moves to “autonomous writing labs” (467) in her discussion of the contested sites of writing lab work. She describes the methodological momentum of the 1920s through 1940s as moving from Carrie Stanley's vision of a dialectic mode, which Boquet describes as being “much like we do today” (467), to a remedial mode, in which “individual improvement was often seen as necessary only for remedial students” (468). She also discusses the medical method in which, at University of North Carolina,

students were sent to the Composition Condition Laboratory because instructors had marked their papers (diagnosed them, in fact) as having a “composition condition” (468). Boquet then follows writing lab method into the 1940s and the shift to a psychological method in writing labs: The Rogerian model of tutoring, which centered on non-directive counseling. Though the Rogerian model maintains the medical (psychological) connection between writing and writing centers, the concept of a non-directive approach to tutoring would later be re-envisioned and become a foundation of modern, canonical writing center theory. While this medical approach is being built, Boquet notes, writing labs “begin to be characterized . . . as places where average students can get help” (470). She then discusses the general lack of literature about writing labs from the early 1950s.

Boquet cites the shift in emphasis, in the 1970s, from remediation to post-open admissions crisis intervention, “as writing centers were created largely to fix problems that university officials had difficulty even naming (472). During this time there are three major methods in the field, according to Boquet: auto-tutorial modules, those critical of them, and those seeking “alternatives to the traditional forms” of writing center work (473). This era seems to be marked by a return to Rogerian counseling approaches to tutoring. It is also when peer tutors began working in writing centers. According to Boquet, available literature on writing labs also changes, and “articles on writing labs in *CCC* and *College English* focus almost entirely on staff selection and training” (475). It is in the late 1970s that the first mention of creative writing work is found in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Marian Arkin’s article, “Special Projects in LaGuardia’s Writing Center,” is little more than a bulleted list of projects, among which is a workshop for creative writers. No further mention of creative writing in writing centers is made in the

*Writing Lab Newsletter* until 1985, in Blake Truscott's "Tutoring the Advanced Writer in a Writing Center." Truscott's argument is for the use of specialized instructors for the benefit of all kinds of "advanced writers," and only briefly touches on creative writers—who automatically gain entry to the realm of advanced writing because they are creative writers. Truscott's privileging of creative writers is especially troubling in that undergraduate students who wished to participate in the special programs had to test into the program. In some ways the model removes permission for non-advanced writers to participate in creative writing.

This article by Truscott comes shortly after Stephen North's articles on writing centers and tutor training, "Training Tutors to Talk about Writing," (1982) and "The Idea of a Writing Center." Both North articles have become parts of a canonized theory of writing centers, one that pivots on the idea of a writing center as a space in which tutors and writers "talk" about writing—what North deems "an intervention in the composing process" ("Training" 434). North's idea of a writing center as a space for writers and of writing center work as fully flexible, writer-centered, "writing talk" does not in any way exclude—and in fact must *include*—creative writers. Yet, North does not, in either of these articles directly deal with this topic. His concern in these two articles is a mix of concern for the ways undergraduates should be taught to tutor and the attitudes he would like his colleagues to have toward the center.

Boquet posits that "North's model is reminiscent of the Rogerian writing center" (477). That model, she reminds us "has been canonized less for what it says about the method of the writing center . . . than for what it suggests about the professionalization of the practitioner." From this point in the early 1980s, Boquet moves directly into the

present—precisely because of the canonization of the Northian/Rogerian method of writing center work.

But in the time gap between the early 1980s and Boquet’s 1999 present—even our 2004 present— lie several articles about creative writing in the center. But in the time gap between the early 1980s and Boquet’s 1999 present—even our 2004 present— lie several articles about creative writing in the center. Though few writing center articles discuss creative writing in writing centers, the majority do so as a “special case.” All but one of the articles focus on workshops as a way to attract creative writers to writing centers or guest writers as a form of community outreach. Kenneth Pobo’s 1991 article, “Creative Writing and the Writing Center,” argues for the need to work with creative writers in the writing center in much the same ways in which we work with other writers. Pobo delineates the ways in which creative writing resembles other writing. Though he addresses possible points of difficulty (mostly emotional discomfort), he also offers remedies. However, Pobo is the only writer in this period who advocates the tutoring of creative writers as part of “normal” writing center practice. Others continue the attitude of creative writing as a “special case,” thus bolstering privileged/disadvantaged position of creative writers. For example, also in 1991, Pamela Farrell writes that bringing in guest artists helps students build a community of writers. Farrell posits her argument about bringing in guest artists as a way to improve student outlooks on writing throughout a school. She does not address student creative writers in the writing center context. Farrell is not alone in advocating for bringing creative writing into writing centers while privileging creative writers and yet not considering them as regular clients.

While Alan Devenish argues for the need to “further remove unnecessary divisions between English departments, creative writing, and writing centers” (6), in his 1991 article “Decentering the Writing Center,” his suggestions for doing so focus on writing circles and writing center outreach to writing groups and the community at large and ignore the possibility of creative writers as writing center clients. Likewise, Diana LeBlanc, in 1995, explains in “Teaching Creative Writing in Writing Centers” that creative writers’ “needs differ from those of the typical writing center conferee” (1) and suggests specialized training for specialized tutors for these specialized writers. This attitude that creative writers are somehow different and that their texts require different approaches is reflected as recently as 2003 in “Eight ways to Tutor Creative Writers,” in which Jennifer Hime and Karen Mowrer argue for a different approach to tutoring creative writers despite their colleagues’ attitudes that “the same rules apply to both creative and noncreative writing” (par. 1) and those same colleagues’ claim that tutoring creative writers is much the same as tutoring other (in Hime’s and Mowrer’s words, “noncreative<sup>3</sup>”) writers. The authors suggest tutors focus on oversimplification, lack of originality, writer investment, predictability, reader enjoyment (or investment), challenges to the intellect and imagination, craft, and imagery. These areas of focus, our authors seem to be saying, are the defining difference between creative and noncreative writers. They may be right about the importance of focusing on these areas, but the question of defining noncreative writing changes the premise completely. A writer who lacks craft and originality is likely not being creative, but one who uses both is not necessarily writing anything other than an academic paper. If these areas of focus are

---

<sup>3</sup> Though I intend to problematize this term as well as what its use suggests in this case, I will continue to use the term noncreative writer for ease of reference.

what define creative writing, what, then, defines noncreative writing? The argument set forth in these articles creates a binary of creative/noncreative writing.

This binary is problematic on several levels. As this study will suggest, the difficulty in defining “creative writing” creates particular problems in this arena. Yet, by current writing center theory, such a binary would not come into consideration. Current theory uses a non-directive approach to, as North writes, tutor writers. The text, then, is a vehicle for the tutor to help the writer improve her or his writing—improvement that should carry over into *all* the writing the writer does. Taken together, though, the binary found in these articles and current theory create a paradox. Just as important, they create the privilege/disadvantage situation creative writers face in writing centers. In the context of writing center theory, the writer would be the center of attention. If so, the binary would apply to the writer, not the text. Thus, a writer would be creative or noncreative. If, then, a creative writer were to present a “special case” to writing center practitioners, that same writer would present a “special case” if she were to come to the center with a piece of academic writing. The writer remains the same. Can that writer be tutored? Are her writing skills greater when she writes poetry? Privileging creative writing in this sense causes a rift between theory and its application. Yet, creative writing’s standing as “special case” is prevalent throughout the writing center literature dealing with the topic.

Boquet’s history would seem to suggest that this attitude is part of the tension of writing center work. The current trend in writing center theory suggests that a Rogerian model of tutoring/counseling would be as effective with creative writers as any other. Boquet seems to challenge the various methods she chronicles. She tells us that her interest in writing centers is partly due to the contradictions writing centers embrace. For

all the contradictions in writing center work, for all the moments in which we refigure, revision, and reinvigorate writing center ideals and methods, writing centers remain places where ideals meet reality. It is in reflecting and changing through intellectual exchange that writing center professionals build community. But it is in how tutors put those ideals into practice that the community is truly reflected. Tutor attitudes and practice mirror the attitudes and practice of their models. Tutor attitudes are therefore one way to reckon how often and how well our ideals meet tutor and writer realities.



## Intersection 2: Mutually Beneficial Tutoring

*Sam<sup>4</sup> and I had worked on his poems as part of my project to understand how tutors could help creative writers. Sam had agreed to help me because he was also taking the tutoring class and figured he'd be able to use the session for one of his projects. The arrangement would be mutually beneficial.*

*For our first session, Sam brought in a villanelle. I'd never seen one before. My first thought was that this was one of the reasons the tutors in my center said they felt uncomfortable tutoring creative writers. So I asked Sam to explain what a villanelle was.*

*Sam told me the "rules" of the form. The rules, though, only raised more questions for me. I asked Sam questions for the entire 45-minute session, and as he explained, he used his poem to give me examples. By showing me, Sam found areas he felt "didn't work" and "fixed" them.*

*I, in turn, learned about villanelles—sort of. I still can't write one, but I have an idea of what it might entail. Still, I know if I were faced with a villanelle, I'd have to ask many of the same questions again.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all student names.

## Methods and Methodology

This study surveys writing center tutors' attitudes toward tutoring creative writers. By better understanding tutor attitudes about tutoring creative writing, I expected to better understand the awkward responses I have seen to creative writing in the center and why I had not seen as much literature or as many presentations about creative writing as I had about most other issues in the writing center field. For me, then, this survey is the first step in a process to better understand the way tutor attitudes shape and are shaped by the writing center field.

Surveys “are the only research tool available to obtain . . . opinions, preferences, beliefs, feelings and other personal information” (MacNealy 148). I wanted to know if tutors were uncomfortable tutoring creative writers, if they treated creative writers differently from other writers, and whether tutor attitudes toward creative writers jibed with writing center theory. A survey, I decided, would allow me to ask tutors to quantify their attitudes as well as to qualify them.

I created the survey and invited users to take it online to expedite the process (MacNealy 150) as well as to reach a broader audience than a hard copy survey would allow due to costs involved in mailings or phone interviews. Online surveys, however, do have some drawbacks. One drawback of all online surveys is the number of survey providers available and the capabilities each offers as compared to cost. I chose [www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com) based on SurveyMonkey offering ease of design, a logic component that allowed navigation, and filtering and analysis of results. “Navigation questions” are points at which a survey creator can control movement through the survey.

Based on the answer a respondent<sup>5</sup> gives, the logic driver of the survey will navigate the respondent to the next appropriate question as defined by the survey designer.

SurveyMonkey's services limited questions to a list of available types. While those types were modifiable in that I could control the response format, there was no way to create a question designed along different lines. For example, I originally planned to ask creative writers to rate their writing on a semantic differential scale, which pits binary characteristics of writing such as strong/weak on opposing ends of a scale with one characteristic at each end of a row marked with the scale's gradations.

Rate Your Writing:					
Strong	___	___	___	___	Weak

**Figure 1: Semantic Differential scale**

According to Plumb and Spyridakis, this scale is useful for measuring respondent attitudes in a writing-centered situation (634). This type of question cannot be used in SurveyMonkey, because while SurveyMonkey allows scale questions, the modifier for the question (ie strong or weak) can only appear on one side of the scale, and the scale must therefore be a traditional scale (ie from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).

Rate Your Writing:				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Strong	___	___	___	___

**Figure 2: Traditional scale**

---

<sup>5</sup> Any person who completes any part of the survey will be considered a respondent for the purpose of this study.

Thus the limitations of the tool affected the design of the survey. This, however, would be true of any tool for survey creation and any method for survey delivery. Mailed surveys, for example, cannot allow for navigation questions that keep respondents from seeing (and therefore being put off by) questions they need not answer.

An invitation to take the survey <sup>6</sup>was posted to the writing center community's elist<sup>7</sup>, WCENTER. The invitation emphasized the anonymous nature of the survey as well as identifying qualified respondents: any one who had tutored writing, creative or not. The invitation included a request that members of the elist share the information with others who tutor writing. In addition, hard copy invitations were distributed at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication convention in San Antonio, TX.

Respondents who logged on to the survey were greeted with a welcome screen containing this message:

Thank you for joining this survey. In this survey, you will be asked a set of questions about who you are and where you work, as well as your feelings about your work as a tutor/consultant. Your name will not be asked so that all answers can remain anonymous. Questions with asterisks require an answer<sup>8</sup>. All others are optional. You may choose to stop the survey at any time. I truly appreciate your taking the time to complete this survey.

Thank you,

Leah F. Cassorla

University of South Florida

---

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A for the text of the invitation.

<sup>7</sup> An elist is an electronic list which sends messages from any subscribed user to all subscribed users.

<sup>8</sup> Only navigation questions were required.

The survey was organized in five sections<sup>9</sup>: demographics, writing reflections, comfort level and past experiences, expected comfort level, and training issues. Sections three and four are parallel sections with tutors who have tutored creative writers answering questions in section three and those who have not answering questions in section four. To better show the relationships between the questions in each section and to emphasize the navigational character of the survey, I will describe each section separately.

### **Section 1:**

The first section, demographics, is intended to ascertain whether sex, age, institution type, or experience tutoring has any effect on tutor attitudes toward tutoring creative writers<sup>10</sup>.

Respondents were asked for their sex. This question is designed with two radio buttons<sup>11</sup> for the answer—one for male and one for female—and is optional, but may offer some insight into differing levels of confidence among different sexes in a female-dominated profession.

Respondents were then asked for their age and asked to provide it in numbers. This information was asked to get a sense of maturity (at least chronologically) and to suggest whether there are attitude differences among tutors at different ages. It was designed to work with the questions of classification, institution type, and years of experience that follow.

---

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix B for a flowchart of the survey.

<sup>10</sup> I have chosen not to consider these relationships in this study, though the information may be useful for further research.

<sup>11</sup> A radio button is a button one clicks on to choose an option. They are generally round and populated by a dot when clicked.

The classification question sought to place the respondent within an educational level category using an option list with the following ranges: Grade 9-12 Student, Undergraduate Student, Master's Student, Doctoral Candidate, Faculty Member, Staff Member, Professional Consultant, Other (Please specify). Choosing "other" prompts a text box for clarification.

Respondents were then asked what type of institution they tutor in. This question was originally designed as an option box, but because of the long list of possibilities, was changed to an open-answer format. Though this format makes the data harder to sort, it allows for more accurate data. This information was expected to provide insight into how and whether institutional settings affect tutor attitudes.

Finally, respondents were asked how much writing center experience they had. The question was designed as a set of options of ranges: "< 1 year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, or > 20 years." The data from this question could be used in conjunction with the other data in this section to measure whether and how tutor attitudes change with tutoring experience.

## **Section 2:**

In section two, respondents were asked to reflect on their definitions of creative writing as well as their own writing practice.

First, respondents were asked to define what creative writing means to them in an open-answer format. Though the standard definition of creative writing has long been poetry and fiction (short or novel), the idea of creative nonfiction has taken root as well, and creative writing is beginning to be identified in all forms of writing. By asking respondents to define creative writing I hoped to get a sense of how they view the world

of creative writing and how the lines are or are not blurred. These attitudes, I felt, might affect attitudes toward tutoring. For example, if a tutor wrote that all writing was creative, that tutor should be comfortable with all tutoring and would also be likely to think no specialized training was necessary.

The second question in this section asks respondents whether they consider themselves creative writers, in a yes or no format. This question is designed to measure how respondents see themselves within the definition they supplied for the first answer and to see if considering oneself a creative writer positively affects comfort levels in tutoring creative writers. It also sought to answer some of the questions raised in the original informal survey I conducted with tutors. Though almost all of those tutors defined themselves as creative writers, almost all identified creative writers as clients they would feel uncomfortable tutoring. I wanted to find out if this attitude/trend applied to a broader set of tutors as well. Respondents who answer that they are not creative writers are moved to section three of the survey. Respondents who self-identified as creative writers were asked to describe and evaluate their writing processes.

I wanted to measure respondent attitudes toward their own creative writing to see if there was a correlation to attitudes toward others' writing. Respondents were therefore asked, "Describe and evaluate your writing process." This approach, I felt, would allow each writer to discuss his or her writing processes as a whole.

### **Section 3:**

Section three began with the navigation question: "Have you tutored creative writers in a Writing Center?" Respondents who answered no moved to section four. Respondents who have tutored creative writers continued in section three.

The first question asked what kind of creative writers respondents had worked with. This question was also designed as a navigation tool. I had planned to create this question with a list of options: poets, fiction writers, writers of creative non-fiction, and “other,” in order to allow respondents to choose more than one. This design would have simplified my survey by allowing easier navigation among follow-up questions. Unfortunately, SurveyMonkey was incapable of handling multiple answers on a single question, so I listed five options for navigation instead: Poets, Fiction Writers, Creative Non-Fiction Writers, “More than one of the above,” or “Other (Please Specify).” In addition to allowing respondents to navigate to a discussion of tutoring with more than one of the three main kinds of creative writers I had chosen to focus on, the approach allowed respondents to navigate to a discussion of creative writing in their own terms and expand on experiences with other types of writing they may have defined as creative in an earlier question.

Based on the respondents’ answers, the survey then navigated to a question that asked if they were comfortable tutoring that kind of writer (in a yes/no format). That question was followed by two open-answer questions: “Please describe your most successful experience with this type of tutorial” and “Please describe your most difficult experience with this type of tutorial.” These questions were designed to evaluate relationships (if such existed) between stated comfort and how the tutors viewed success and difficulty.

Respondents who answered “More than one of the above” were led through these three questions (comfort, success, difficulty) for each of the types of writer. However, instead of the comfort question having only yes or no as options, respondents were also



offered the option: “I haven’t tutored a” followed by the type of writer (ie “I haven’t tutored a poet”). This option included directions to skip the descriptive answers for that question and go to the next type of writer because of SurveyMonkey’s limited navigational capability. By creating this range of options, I hoped to enable tutors to more fully express their comfort levels.

These respondents were then navigated to section five because section four was only for respondents who said they had never tutored creative writers.

#### **Section 4:**

Section four measured comfort levels for respondents who answered that they had never tutored creative writers. Because tutors’ expectations might affect tutor behaviors and attitudes, this section comprises two questions. First, respondents are asked if they “would feel comfortable” if faced with a creative writer in a tutorial in a yes or no format. The second asks for an explanation of (or expansion on) the answer to the first. Here, tutors can describe their attitudes toward tutoring creative writers beyond a simple question of comfort. After these questions, respondents were navigated to section five.

#### **Section 5:**

The two questions in section five measured tutor attitudes toward training for tutoring creative writers. I expected that if, in fact, tutors were uncomfortable tutoring creative writers, this section would allow them to explore or suggest tools they thought would increase their comfort levels. The first question asked respondents what training they had received for working with creative writers. This question was designed to build some knowledge base about whether and how regularly writing centers tutors were trained to tutor creative writers. The second asked for suggestions on what kinds of tools

tutors felt would help them to work with creative writers. I hoped that such suggestions would help me evaluate comfort and discomfort and general attitudes. I thought it might also act as a starting point to other studies that could provide tutors with the tools they needed or wanted.

### Intersection 3: An Unexpected Creative Writer

*Jesse came in to the writing center with a “problem.” He was a business student trying to get into an MBA program and trying to get a scholarship. The scholarship, he explained, was not specific to any major. The only requirement: that he write a story for children 8-12 years old. The “problem,” according to Jesse: the story had to be between 110 and 240 words. He had more than 300, was not yet done with his story, and wanted to know how to cut the story down.*

*Jesse and I talked a good bit about stories and how to tell them. He told me about his idea for what he called an “epic,” which sparked a discussion of how one would fit an epic into 240 words. I read his story. It was not a story, but an outline for a novel. The word count seemed too limiting. Jesse said he didn’t think it made sense either. We talked about some choices he had made and how he could cut the story. But we couldn’t find parts Jesse felt comfortable doing without, so we logged on to the site where he had seen the scholarship—looking for a loophole.*

*We checked the details. The contest called for a novel for children 8-12 years old. The parameters were 110-240 pages. I’ve never seen someone so relieved. Jesse asked if I thought he could do that with what he had. We discussed it, and he decided he could. We sat down and talked about how to go about writing a novel. He wrote the first chapter within a few weeks. Jesse was hooked.*

*Jesse is not the creative writer we often think or talk about when we discuss bringing creative writers into the center. He doesn’t think of himself as a creative writer; he just had a story to tell and is teaching himself how to tell it well. Jesse would not be considered an “advanced writer.” He would not have come to a poetry reading held at the center. He would not have responded to an invitation to creative writers on campus. Yet he walked into our center and brought a story along and made me realize that sometimes creative writers come with error-filled texts, no intention of “being writers,” and beautiful stories they can tell well.*

*The deadline for the scholarship has long since passed, but Jesse continues working on his novel anyway.*

## **Summary of Results**

In considering my results, I decided to focus on three areas: definitions of creative writing, respondents' comfort levels in tutoring creative writers, and training issues. Because the survey did not require a respondent to answer all questions, the number of total respondents does not equal the number of respondents in each of the three areas. Of the 115 respondents, 90 defined creative writing, 105 answered comfort questions, and 71 responded to questions on training issues. I analyzed the answers in these three areas by coding them into categories. I had defined the categories through reading and rereading the responses in what Wendy Bishop refers to as an "intuitive" way (117). Much like Bishop's description of Helen Rolfe's experience coding results to achieve data reduction, I found that the more I read through my respondents' answers, took notes about how they chose to answer, and looked at how those responses fit together (with other answers and other respondents), the more certain categories suggested themselves.

### **Defining Creative Writing:**

Though creative writing has traditionally been defined in terms of poetry and fictional prose, some definitions also include forms of creative nonfiction such as literary journalism, memoirs, and personal essays. Moreover, there are those who say that any act of writing is an inherently creative act. Defining creative writing is thus a fairly slippery slope, yet the definitions are important to this study because tutor definitions of creative writing affect how they view tutorials with creative writers.

Tutors were asked to define creative writing and were given an open text space in which to do so. There were no limitations placed on the length of tutor definitions. The

data was then coded into several “major” categories with subcategories in some. The major categories within tutor definitions were:

- By process
- By genre
- Any writing
- As opposed to academic writing
- By lack of facts
- Descriptive
- Anomaly.

Of the 90 respondents who chose to define creative writing, 50 defined it in only one of the major categories. These responses are represented in Figure 1:

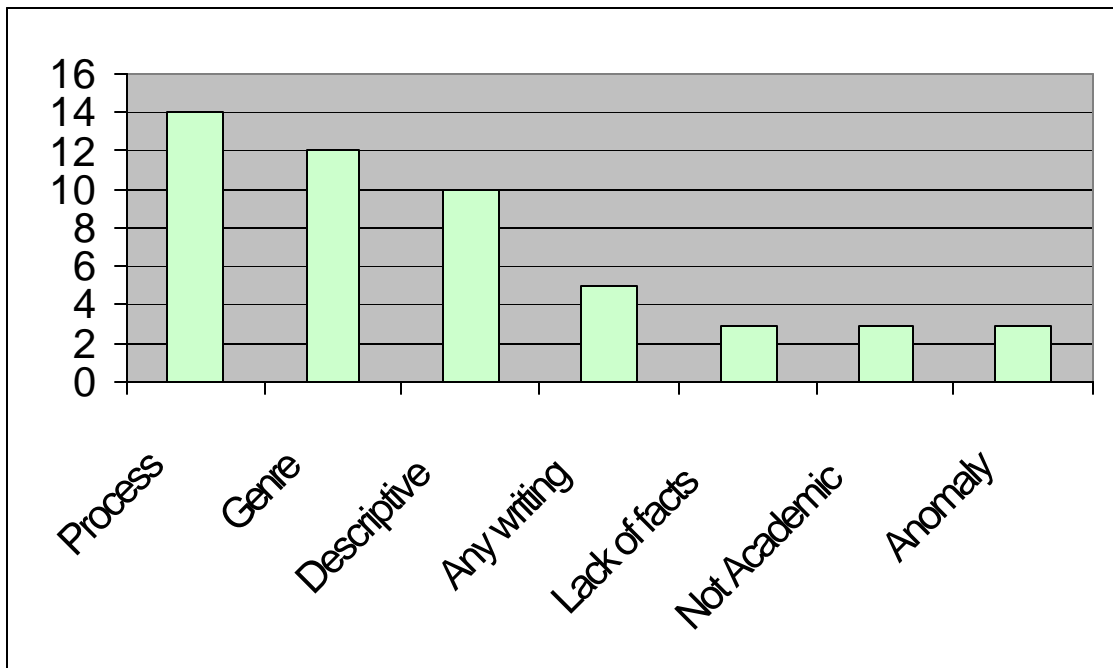


Figure 3: Respondent Definitions: Defined in One Category

Of the 50 respondents whose definitions fell into only one major category, most defined creative writing using either process or genre with 14 and 12 respondents, respectively, in each category. Ten respondents gave purely descriptive responses such as “beautiful emotive”<sup>12</sup> while only 5 defined any writing as creative writing. Three respondents each provided definitions of creative writing as opposed to academic writing and as defined by a lack of facts. And three respondents gave definitions that were entirely anomalous, either because they were questions to other answers or because they made no sense to me as definitions. These definitions were: “I occasionally journal and then cull those journals for poetry,” “Hot stuff,” and “Alchemy of the soul.” The remaining 40 respondents wrote definitions that encompassed two or more of the major categories.

Within the first 3 major categories, I coded responses into subcategories that expand on how those categories of definition were expressed. For definitions that relied on process, those subcategories are imagination, artistry, authorial intent, and impetus.

Of the 90 respondents, 21 included process in their definitions. Some examples of process based responses follow:

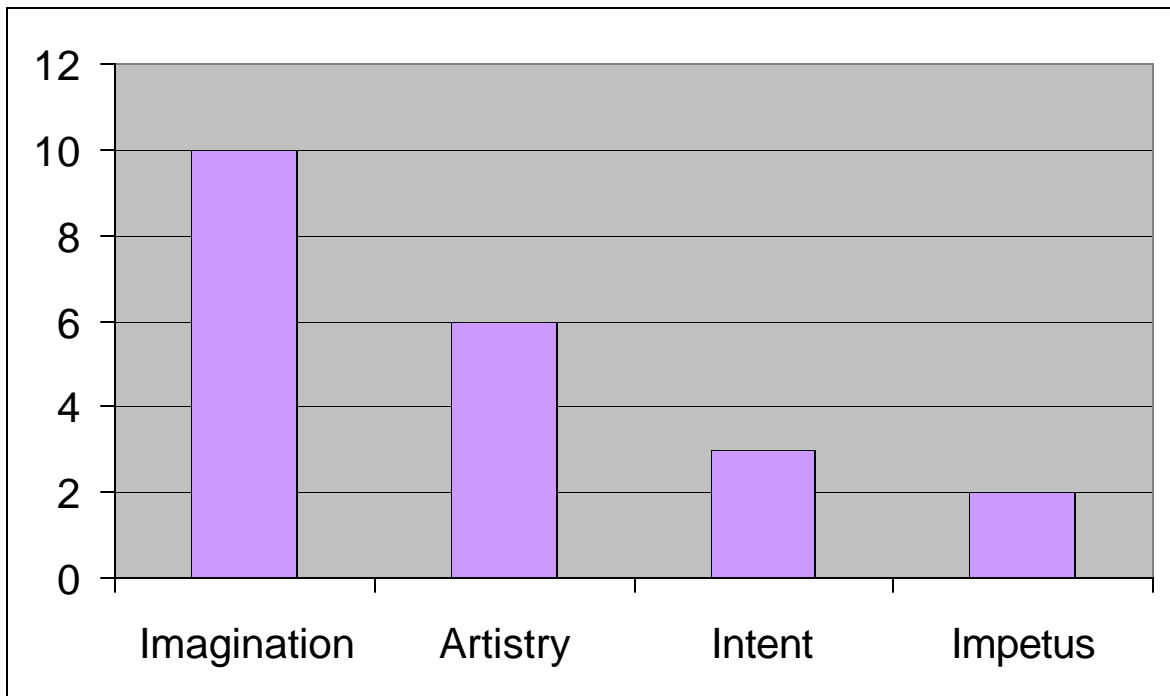
- I think that is being able to open up to more details and letting your imagination flow.
- Writing whose primary impetus and basis stems not from prerecorded history or data but rather from the individual's own psyche.

---

<sup>12</sup> All respondent answers have been edited for spelling and grammatical errors. I have decided, however, not to change punctuation as in some cases that change would require me to make a decision about specific intent. The responses are often written in the general shorthand used online (with extra spaces used to connote additional thoughts, etc.), the responses may therefore sometimes seem odd. I felt, however, that it was important to leave them as they were—though I did remove extra spaces for ease of reading—because to me these responses also exhibit a level of comfort that connotes tutors were involved more in answering than in being “correct.”

- Writing combining self expression with any learned form of writing styles. Basically it is writing done for personal or enjoyable reasons but can include writing in assignments.
- Writing that comes from the writer's imagination as well as writing that requires personal input and description.
- Developing written art that portrays ideas in an informal manner.
- Something that steps away from the constraints of scholarly writing to explore the depths of a writer's imagination.

Of the 21 respondents who included process in their definitions of creative writing such as these, 10 cited imagination and 6 artistry. Of these two most popular definitions, 9 mentioned *only* imagination and 3 mentioned *only* artistry.



**Figure 4: Respondent Definition: By Process.**

Intent, from 3 respondents and impetus from 2 are not at all mentioned without some other component in the definition. The heavy emphasis on imagination and artistry may indicate some of the reasons why creative writing is privileged (and disadvantaged) in the writing center<sup>13</sup>.

Thirty-four of the 90 respondents who defined creative writing specified genres in their definitions. Many of these writers also employed language that fell into other major categories. Here are some of the ways in which respondents used genre to define creative writing:

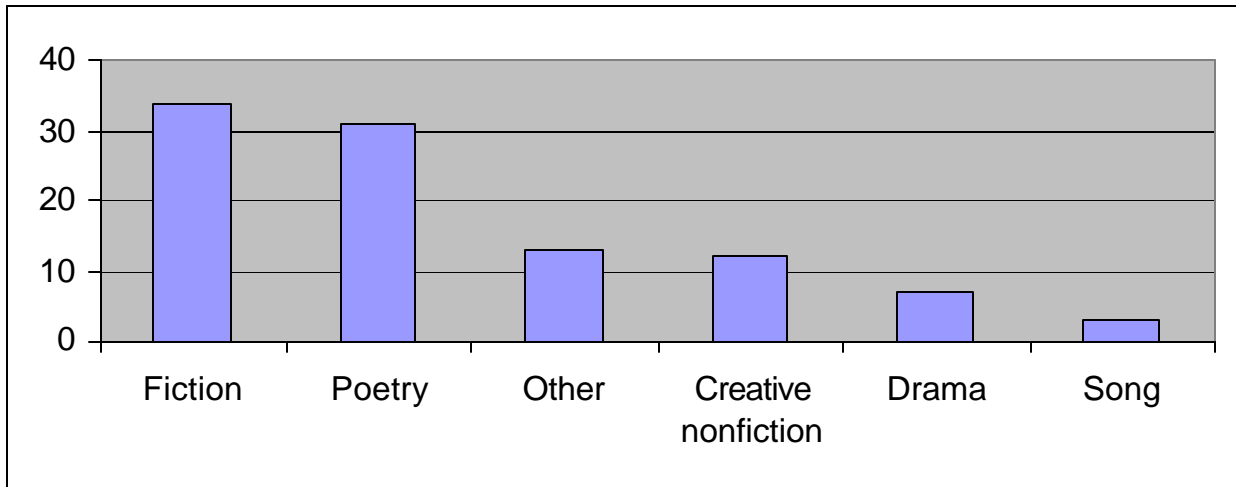
- Writing of stories poetry and scripts designed to entertain and/or teach. (This response was coded both by genre and by process—as intent)
- Creative writing is writing in which the writer is concerned with craft. Academic writing is often creative writing as are the genres more commonly listed under creative writing: fiction poetry drama creative non-fiction.
- Writing that heads toward literature writing that attempts to use literary devices to create art writing that involves literary genres (memoir fiction poetry etc.)--okay I suck at defining terms.
- Creative writing includes nonfiction prose poetry fiction or other writing generated from experience observation knowledge and imagination. Creative writing is intended for a broad audience but does not necessarily exclude the academy.
- Creative nonfiction poetry prose hypertext that primarily emphasizes the expressive function.

---

<sup>13</sup> This point will be addressed further in the discussion section.



The subcategories of genre used are fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, drama, song<sup>14</sup>, and “other” (primarily genres such as hypertext as in the above example, but also including other definitions such as journal entries).



**Figure 5: Respondent Definitions: By Genre.**

All respondents who mentioned genre (34) mentioned fiction, and only 3 did not mention poetry. Creative non-fiction—though one less person included it (12) than respondents who had included a genre that fell under the “other” category (13)—is the third defined category with drama and song (7 and 3 respectively) with the least mentions.

Therefore, though creating the survey with three defined genres of creative writing is inherently limiting, 34 respondents defined creative writing within genres and among those, most worked within the three definitions used by the survey—even though they had not yet seen the questions that used specific genres. In addition, though tutors

---

<sup>14</sup> I have included song separately from poetry because respondents did so. I also note that though drama and song were so seldom mentioned, they are the oral precursors of written language, a point that calls for further investigation into tutor attitudes.

were allowed to include “other” writers in their answers to later questions, only 4 of 115 overall respondents did.

In addition to process and genre, I found that of the 13 respondents who said any writing was creative, 7 qualified their answers, placing “any writing” on a continuum while six allowed “all writing” to stand, either defending their choice or simply leaving it as such. Below are the thirteen responses:

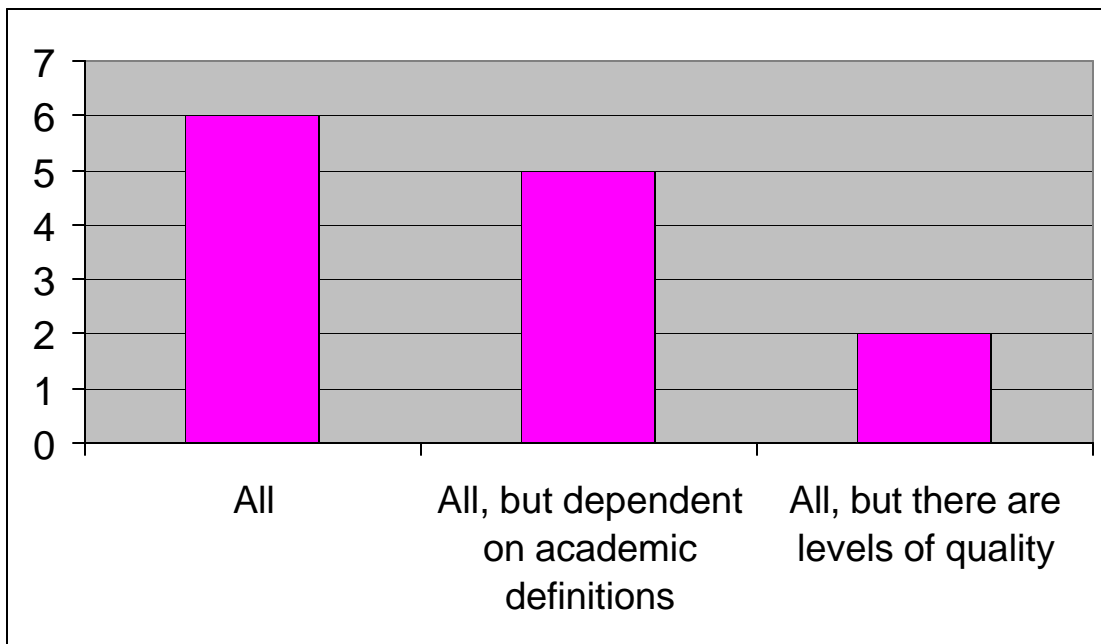
- I define creative writing as writing that pushes limits and tries new things in whatever format--an academic essay to a villanelle. In our institution it usually gets defined as fiction drama or poetry so my definition is a bit broader I guess.
- Any writing actually-- but for these purposes poetry short stories and creative nonfiction (a circular answer I know).
- All writing is creative writing in that the author infuses his or her work with his or her own particular voice and brings to light specific points the writer feels are important. Even the most mundane topic calls for interesting presentation and a writer's unique style is always evident to some degree.
- Personally all writing has some creative element to it. Like on a continuum--some leans far more toward the technical which I do see as the opposite pole and some writing leans far more toward the purely creative while most writing that students do lies somewhere in the middle.
- Any kind of writing is creating however for tutoring I define it as narrative fiction and poetry.
- Broadly as creativity in writing tasks. Narrowly/institutionally as fiction/poetry and creative non-fiction. And in the middle ground as any hybrid writing using

the established conventions of these discourses (probably among others). In any case where we \_recognize\_ writing as creative I believe we are matching elements of that writing to the conventions of established discourses which are identified as creative at various cultural sites. In other words I think the creative is recognizable in established forms of discourse which have more or less stable rules and conventions of their own (like fiction for example but not just fiction). It is not simply the product of free flights of invention that transcend the normal rules (how we tell creative from nonsense). And I believe that creativity in this way involves methodologies that can be taught.

- I think almost any kind of writing can be creative when it requires us to use our imaginations.
- All writing is creative including nonfiction. I guess most people define it as imaginative fictional works but I think any work with a strong sense of voice or personality to it is similar to imaginative fiction.
- Creative writing is writing in which the writer is concerned with craft. Academic writing is often creative writing as are the genres more commonly listed under creative writing: fiction poetry drama creative non-fiction.
- I define all writing as a creative process.
- All writing is creative to me. Creative nonfiction fiction poetry lyrics speeches persuasive writing etc.
- All writing is creative writing but some writing is more creative than others. It usually includes poems and stories designed by the student and for purposes beyond classwork.

- I think all writing is creative in some broad sense. The difference between creative writing and academic or expository writing may lie in the ultimate purpose of each though even that distinction may be blurry. Creative writing wants to delight to challenge to make us see anew to reveal Truth and takes up residence in our hearts. Expository writing wants to convince to make us see more clearly to show truth and lives in our minds. But no--the more I think of it the more impossible it is to differentiate between the two.

As can be seen, even respondents who felt all writing was creative expressed a need to situate their definitions within their beliefs of the survey's or their academic community's expectations.



**Figure 6: Respondent Definitions: Any Writing.**

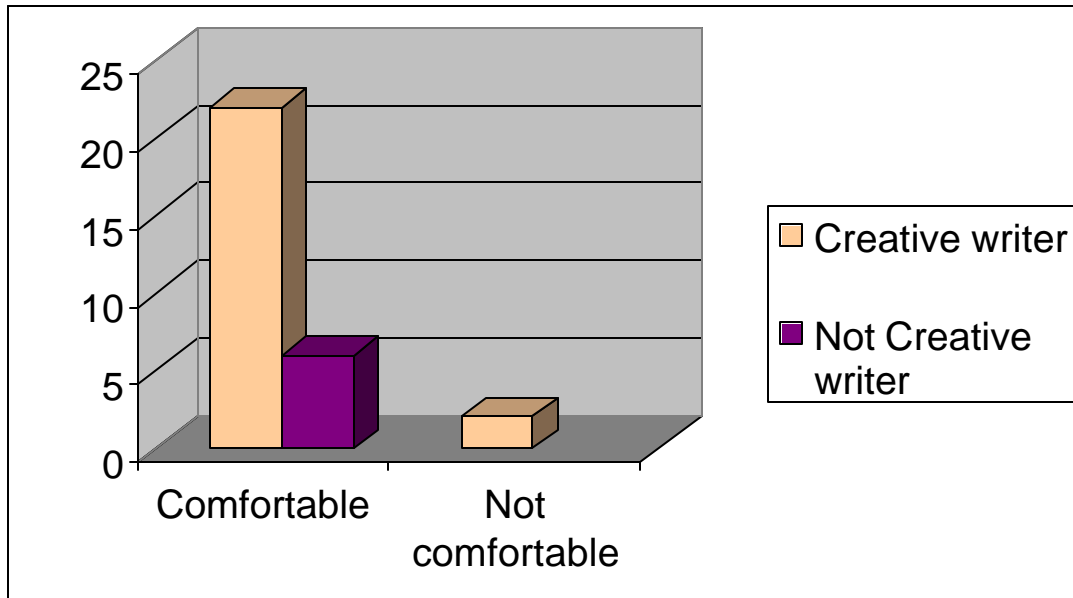
Though 6 of the respondents defined all writing as creative, 5 more defined all writing as creative but added that in the academic world such definitions are not accepted or

expressed that they expected the survey to not include anything outside of traditionalist notions of creative writing. An additional 2 respondents qualified all writing as creative by stating that there were levels of ability and creativity used in writing and therefore some types of writing are more creative than others.

Three respondents classified creative writing by its lack of facts, such as this description: “Any writing that is not purely factual. Made up works.” Descriptive definitions were those that described the effects of creative writing, or defined writing in vague descriptive terms such as “with flair, not wordy.”

### **Comfort Levels:**

Unfortunately, there were not enough respondents with experience tutoring writers in any given category of creative writing to tell whether identifying oneself as a creative writer made a tutor more comfortable tutoring creative writers. According to Mason, Lind, and Marchal Chi-Square “should not be applied if more than 20 percent of the [frequency] cells have expected frequencies less than 5” (p.522). The only possible trend that can be measured is that regardless of self-identification, respondents seem more comfortable with creative nonfiction than with either fiction or poetry. Fiction was the next area in which respondents said they were comfortable, and poetry was last.

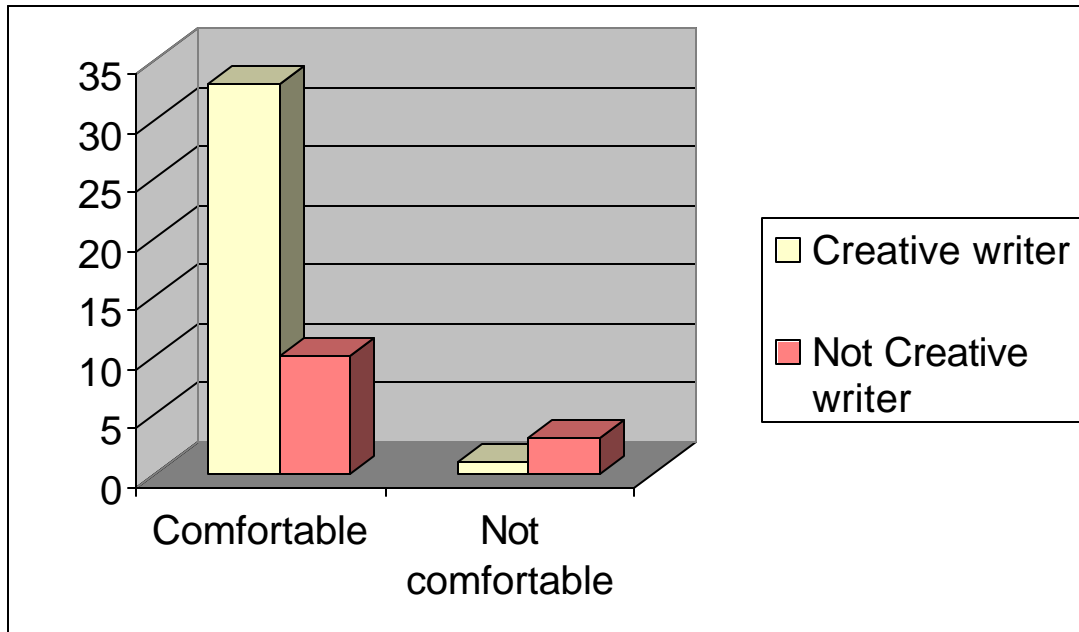


**Figure 7: Respondent Comfort: Creative Nonfiction.**

In fact, among non-identifiers<sup>15</sup> who responded regarding their comfort with nonfiction, all said they were comfortable with such writers. Of creative writers, 8.3 percent said they were uncomfortable tutoring writers of nonfiction. In the two other genres for which respondents were asked to describe their comfort level, the positions were reversed. Although the majority of non-identifiers (76.9 percent) said they were comfortable tutoring fiction writers, a higher percentage (97 percent) of creative writers expressed comfort. In fact, of the 34 creative writer respondents who answered the questions about fiction, only one said he or she was uncomfortable. Hence in this relatively small sample, self-identified creative writers were considerably more comfortable tutoring creative writers than non-identifiers.

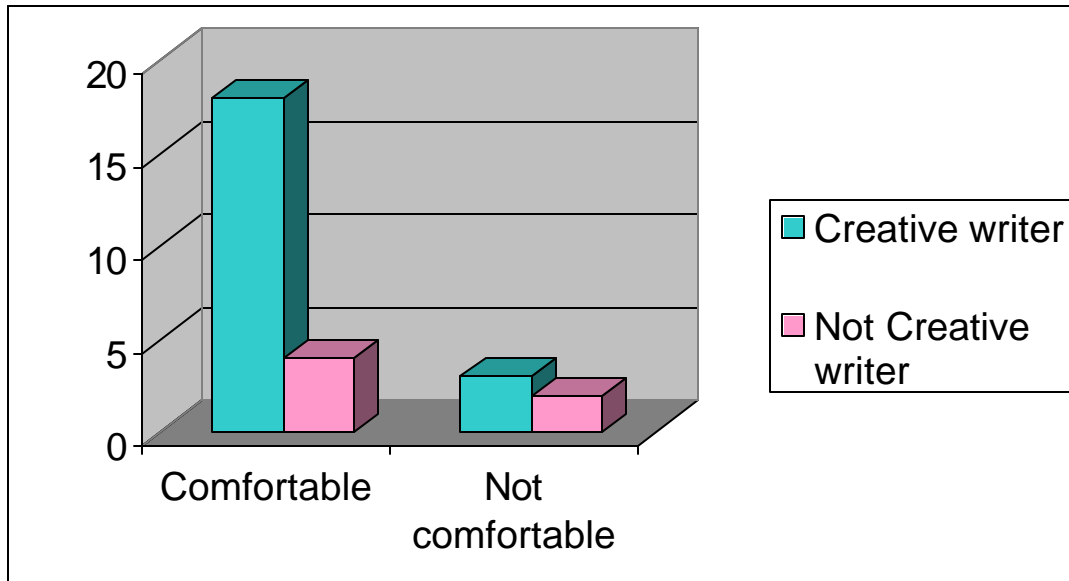
---

<sup>15</sup> I will use this term as a matter of convenience and because it would be inaccurate to refer to these respondents as non-creative writers (both because I am of the school that sees all writing as inherently creative and because these respondents did not identify as non-creative writers; they simply did not identify as creative writers).



**Figure 8 Respondent Comfort: Fiction.**

Among respondents who answered the questions regarding comfort with poets, a lower percentage of creative writers (87 percent) said they were comfortable than those who had answered regarding fiction. Among non-identifiers, the level of comfort expressed was also lower, with two-thirds saying they were comfortable, and one-third saying they were uncomfortable.



**Figure 9: Respondent Comfort: Poetry.**

The two phenomena, therefore, that I mark from these data are the similar patterns of comfort within the two groups, and the overall comfort level among respondents. Most respondents were comfortable tutoring creative writers, and the pattern of comfort ranked from creative nonfiction (at the greatest level of comfort) to poetry (at the lowest level of comfort) regardless of respondent identification or non-identification.

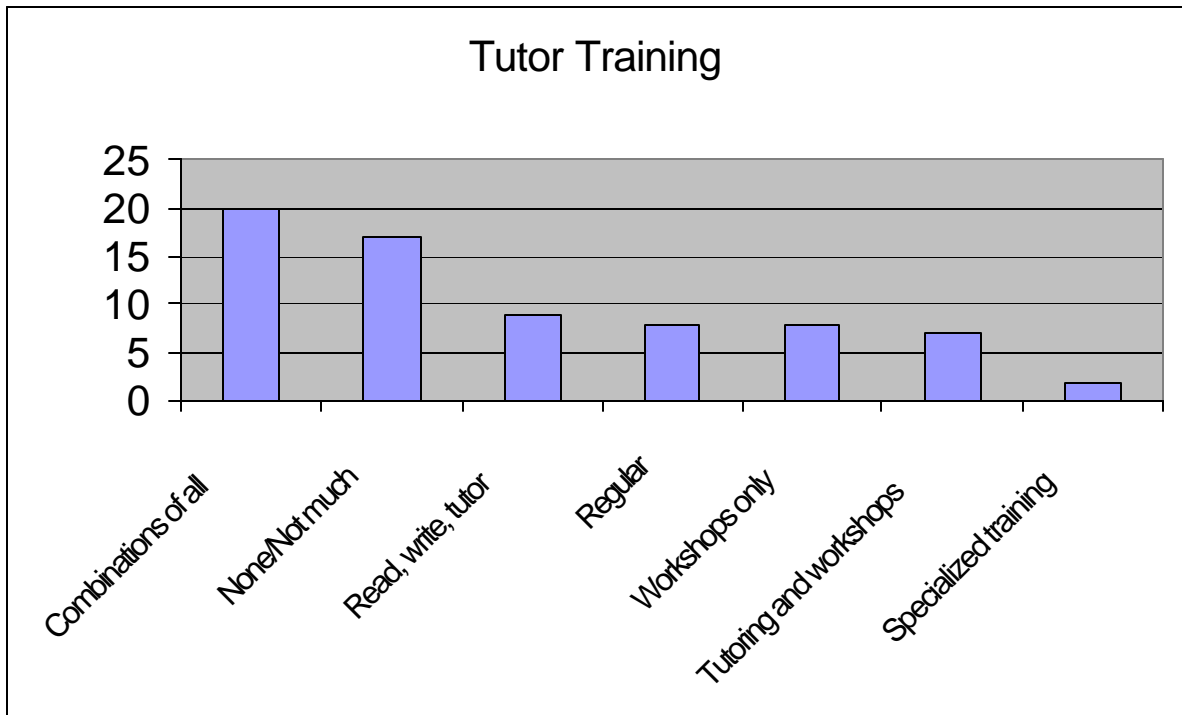
### **Training Issues:**

The final section included two questions about training. The first asked tutors to explain what training they did have to tutor creative writers; the second asked what training they would suggest tutors have before they tutor creative writers.

Seventy-one of the 115 respondents answered the first question, and 61 answered the second. Their answers vary and overlap. Respondent reports of training they had fell into 7 categories:



- None/not much
- Writing, reading, and tutoring
- Regular training sufficed
- Workshops only
- Tutoring experience and workshops
- Writing center offered specialized training
- And several other combinations of these training types.



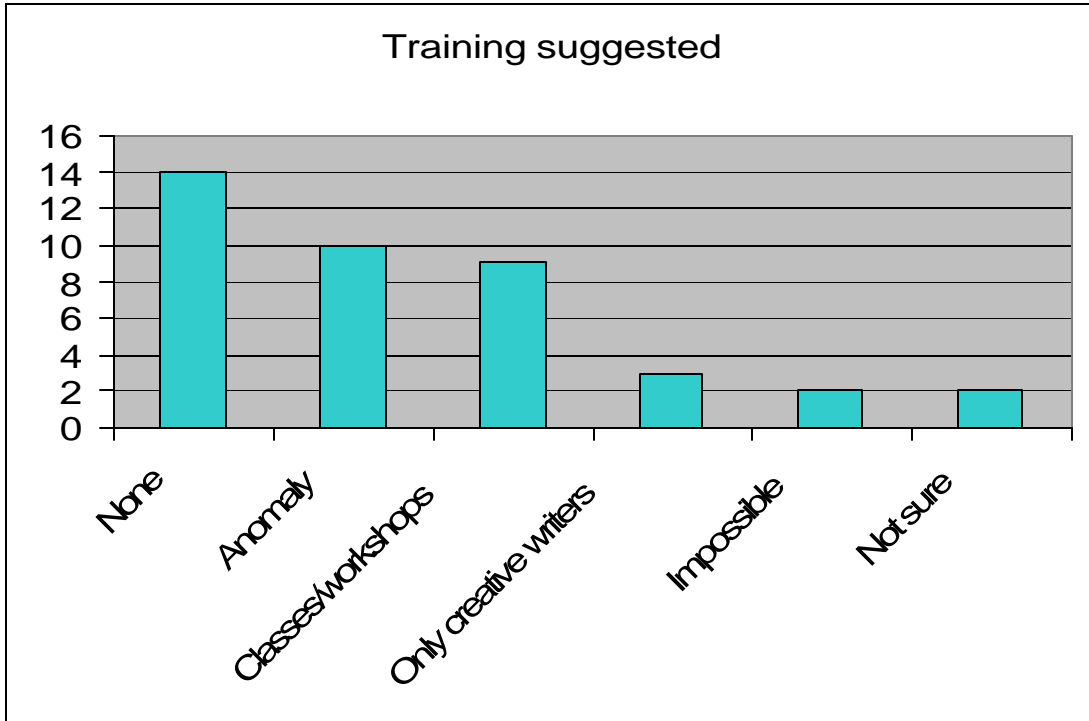
**Figure 10: Training Issues: Training Tutors Have.**

Nearly a third (20) of respondents claimed a combination of tutoring experience, workshop experience, and their status as a writer or avid reader as their training for working with creative writers, including such responses as:

- Well I am the director and my Ph.D. is in creative writing so....
- I write I read
- I have taken creative writing workshops at both undergrad and grad levels at two different universities; I have participated in non-academic writing groups with other creative writers; I have been tutoring and teaching writing since 1993; I teach a unit on creative writing history theory and pedagogy as part of the grad level course on teaching writing that all GTAs at my university take before teaching the first time; I read fiction voraciously!
- ....? No specific training. My training comes from my own experiences as a creative writer and from the arsenal of strategies I've developed during my three years of tutoring.
- Creative writing workshops.
- Extensive participation in workshops at undergrad and graduate levels.

But only 2.81 percent (2 respondents) said they had received specialized training for the task as part of their formal writing center training. Most significantly, only 11.26 percent (8 respondents) said their “regular” writing center training sufficed.

The respondents’ training for tutoring creative writers did not seem to translate into their ideas of how tutors should be trained for tutoring creative writers. Of the 61 respondents, 30 suggested some form, or combination of forms, of specialized training.



**Figure 11: Training Issues: Training Tutors Suggest.**

Of the 61 respondents, 2 said it was impossible to train tutors to tutor creative writers, and 3 expressed the belief that only creative writers could tutor creative writers, including one respondent who went into detail about why he or she felt that way. That respondent wrote:

hmmm...I hate to be the bearer of bad news but I do not see a way right now that tutors can be trained to work with creative writers. Tutors wouldn't know what to do what to read for. One can be trained in such matters but if one's scholarship has nothing to do with creative anything and all that one person cares about is how to tutor in one genre--then...there's bound to be some resistance i.e. writing centers aren't places where such tutoring can (should) take place.

One respondent wrote, “Taking crwr classes ONLY if they're interested and if not they shouldn't have to tutor creative writers” in response to this question. However, 21 respondents suggested workshops and 9 suggested that practice with these kinds of tutorials, writing, and reading would suffice to train tutors for this kind of tutoring. For example, one respondent wrote, “take a creative writing course or two and read lots of creative writing that is successful.” Of the 61 respondents, only 14 said they did not think any specialized tutoring was necessary. One respondent wrote:

I think the best training for working with any (type of) writer will necessarily include student writer voices. So the best training I could imagine would include the voices of those who consider themselves creative writers. I'm not convinced however that tutoring creative writers is all that much different than tutoring other creative but not CREATIVE writers.

Responses coded as anomalies were those that spoke about how to tutor a creative writer rather than how to train tutors to tutor creative writers.

## Intersection 4: Coming Full Circle

*In early March, 2004, Laura Butler, a member of WCENTER, the writing center professionals' list, posted a comment and question about creative writing in the writing center. "In the past ten years, I have noticed a distinct lack of utilization of writing center for creative writing," (par. 1). She then asked if anyone knew of literature besides the little she had seen. "I am hoping to hear anecdotal evidence of your experiences as tutors or directors" (par. 2). The responses created a thread that comes full circle for me. I see in it the foundation for my argument.*

*Sylvia Newman responded with an explanation that creative writers see themselves as "good writers" and not in need of help:*

I have also found that most of my tutors don't feel comfortable or qualified to critique creative writing the way they do academic writing--although every year I have two or three tutors who are experienced creative writers and we direct those few students who do bring in their non-academic writing to them. (par. 1)

*Newman also told of a creative writers' group that met in the writing center the previous year, but said writers and tutors had lost interest, though the program had been successful.*

*Laura Merrill responded with enthusiasm, "When students walk into our WC for help with a creative writing assignment, I jump at the chance to work with them. I have my MFA in poetry and I love to have conversations with students about their creative writing" (par. 1). In dealing with training issues, Merrill suggests that creative-writing-specific training might help reinforce writing center pedagogy:*

You asked about training tutors to respond to creative writing. In our training, we have tutors practice responding to a variety of writing assignments. I wonder if including examples from beginning creative writers might increase tutors' comfort level, and also help them to see that, when working with creative writers, they'll ask lots of the same questions as they do when working with students from other disciplines. Specific examples may also spark a conversation about what's different about helping students with creative work. For example, since many creative writers feel a powerful connection to their writing, it may be even more important to offer praise for something—even if it's a line or sentence—that's working particularly well in their piece. (par. 4)

*Amy Zenger considers another dimension connected to creative writing. She points out that the question tells us a lot about how we are perceived—as a remediation center—and how we privilege creative writing. "If we imagine it as being for the BENEFIT of all writers (especially as they define benefit for themselves), it probably would incorporate creative writers easily. But if we think of the center as a place for writers who NEED help (especially as defined by other people) we'll be more likely to work with required/academic writing" (par. 4).*

*Laura Butler posted again, saying the conversation had been exactly what she was looking for and added that she intends to use creative writing to change that attitude in her particular center.*

*Bringing us full circle, Neal Lerner posted a quote from a 1951 conference workshop:*

The third type of writing laboratory discussed in the workshop, of first interest to some of the members, has not so much a service function as the other two [a lab for remediation and a lab open to any student at any level]. Here appear voluntarily students who want advice about 'creative writing' --narrative, poetry, etc. The advantages of prizes and publication as a part of this laboratory were pointed out. (par. 2)

*The points made in this discussion point directly to what I wish to discuss. I agree that drawing creative writers to the center can change the way a center is perceived. I feel, however, that "special" writing groups or workshops work to attract these students as a privileged group and leave them in that position. The key, I think, is to attract creative writers to the center as clients of the center just like any other client.*

*When I speak of creating a writers' space, I imagine that space to be a place writers write and talk about writing. I imagine a place that is part computer lab, part tutoring space, and part coffee house. I imagine this space as elevated beyond remediation—not to keep remedial students out, but to motivate them to be there—and yet not privileged to "writers" in the exclusive sense. I imagine this space because writing, at any level, is an activity that is both lonely and communal, and the writing center should be the place where a writer can be either or both.*

## Discussion

Defining creative writing seems as difficult as explaining what qualifies some books for placement in the “Literature” section of a bookstore and leaves others in “Fiction” or “Poetry.” Both speak to questions of canonicity. The difficulty of defining creative writing can be seen in how tutors who responded to the question on defining creative writing approached the task.

That tutors struggled to find definitions of creative writing is not surprising. Most official definitions<sup>16</sup> tend to fall in line with the 5 respondents who defined all writing as creative but added that writing can be perceived differently, dependent on the situation. One such respondent wrote, “Any kind of writing is creating however for tutoring I define it as narrative fiction and poetry.” This tutor defines all writing within the realm of creativity, but acknowledges that tutoring requires one to draw more specific lines and create a more guarded definition. But why does tutoring require this? Still another respondent limited the definition based on her or his expectations of the survey: “Any writing actually--but for these purposes poetry short stories and creative nonfiction (a circular answer I know).” The respondent’s answer clearly identifies her or his expectations in this situation. “For these purposes” the tutor knows she or he will be asked to limit the definition. And though this respondent is somewhat right (the definitions of creative writing were broadly defined in this study), she or he is also somewhat wrong (respondents were also offered the opportunity to create and answer questions about any “other” kind of writer they chose to define as creative).

---

<sup>16</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary online, for example, defines creative writing as “imaginative; exhibiting imagination as well as intellect, and thus differentiated from the merely critical, ‘academic’, journalistic, professional, mechanical, etc., in literary or artistic production. So creative writing, such writing; also freq. in the U.S. as a course of study.”

The difficulty in defining creative writing essentially affects both tutor attitudes toward creative writing and expectations of what/who a creative writer is. In the common definitions, we look toward published writers in specific genres. But this set of expectations can be misleading because the most basic of writers often enjoy creative writing—their use of imagination, their impetus to write, their process is no less creative for the apparent errors they make or for the skills they apparently lack. By limiting the scope of creative writing to advanced writing, we take away the most enjoyable writing some students have (often students who are otherwise very resistant to writing). In addition, by privileging creative writers in this way we exempt the advanced creative writer from the work of the writing center—reflection on and intervention in the writing process. This attitude toward creative writing may also affect comfort levels for tutoring creative writers and the feeling that a tutorial with a creative writer is somehow “different.” The privileging affect this train of thought has can be detrimental to the creative writer who comes in for a tutorial—for example, that writer might be directed to the center’s workshop instead of the one-on-one work that writer was seeking.

I had expected to find that tutors were uncomfortable tutoring creative writers, but most tutors said they were comfortable with it. I then surmised that because 74 of the 105 respondents indicated that they *were* creative writers, a matter of self-selection for a survey on tutoring creative writers was at play. However, there is not a large enough sample to draw any statistically significant conclusions as to whether there is a correlation between identification and comfort. Further research is necessary to ascertain this statistical independence to a generalizable degree.



What is clear is that among this sample of respondents, the difference between those who were comfortable and those who were not was greater among creative writers in the categories of fiction and poetry, but not in nonfiction. Though both groups show greater comfort than discomfort in fiction and poetry, a higher percentage of non-identifiers show discomfort (23 percent of non-identifiers as compared to 2.9 percent of creative writers). Only one respondent expressed discomfort tutoring a creative writer. This respondent described the discomfort of his or her most difficult tutoring situation, and that situation seems to be the only experience this respondent had tutoring a fiction writer: “I can only remember one time that I worked with a fiction writer. For some reason we had a hard time getting a sense of her audience so it was difficult to know what to focus on.”

In addition, the general trend, among both those who identified as creative writers and those who did not identify as creative writers, was to be most comfortable with creative nonfiction (100 percent of non-identifiers and 91.66 percent of identifiers), next with fiction and finally least with poetry. It is only in the area of nonfiction that all non-identifiers reported comfort with tutoring such writers and in each other case (fiction and poetry), the non-identifiers had a lower rate of comfort than those who did identify as creative writers. This raises the question of how tutors define non-fiction and their own attitudes toward fiction and poetry. Though this question clearly needs more in-depth research, the results seem to suggest that respondents may feel that they are more comfortable with the conventions of nonfiction than with those of fiction and in particular those of poetry. In fact, one respondent suggests just that: “I have helped several students

turn in letters to the editor work that I consider to be creative non-fiction. Here the rules are not too different from normal tutoring so I feel much more at ease.”

Unfortunately, not enough respondents chose to answer questions in the “other” category for there to be generalizable data for this category. Though I designed this category to allow respondents to further their definitions of creative writing, only 4 respondents chose to do so. Of the 4, however, one commented in general about why she or he felt tutoring creative writers was more difficult than tutoring other writers (in this response “academic” writers):

I have a difficult time tutoring creative writing that I don't really see as going anywhere. This is an odd admission to make but somehow I seem to be more critical of creative writing than I am of academic writing. Maybe it's because I rarely think my own creative writing is any good. Hmm.

The comment offers a different look at why some creative writers might find it more difficult to tutor creative writers.

Respondents who had never tutored creative writers were only asked about their general comfort level with creative writers (again leaving open the opportunity for these respondents to define the term for themselves). These respondents were also given the choice of “other” in answering whether they *would* be comfortable tutoring creative writers. Of the 30 respondents who answered this line of questioning, only 1 respondent chose this option and in response to the prompt to specify why he or she chose “other,” the respondent answered, “I would enjoy working with beginning writers. Showing them small techniques, such as the use of strong verbs, ways to tighten their language.”

Overall, then, respondents are comfortable tutoring creative writers. However, the results of the training section of the survey suggest some surprising and troubling possibilities for explaining why—despite general comfort—creative writing is privileged in writing centers, and these attitudes toward training for tutoring creative writers bears more examination.

I did not know what to expect from the questions about attitudes toward training, but the majority of current theory would indicate that no specialized training should be necessary. The theory that a writing center professional's "job has most to do with the writer, not the text" (North, "Training" 436) should preclude specialized training for work with certain texts. Yet, 34.4 percent of respondents suggested some combination of practice tutorials, reading, writing, and/or lectures by a creative writing instructor as their preference for training. An additional 14.7 percent said the training should be through the use of workshops and/or creative writing classes. Taken in comparison with only 22.9 percent of respondents who said no specialized training was necessary, the expressed attitudes of these 49.9 percent of respondents seem to indicate a gap between canonized theory and tutor attitudes. Also, in light of such articles as "Eight Ways to Tutor Creative Writers," these results demonstrate a need for intense scrutiny of both tutor attitudes and canonized theory. This suggestion is promoted in some of the canon, notably in North's "Training Tutors to Talk about Writing." North, in presenting his theory of tutoring, suggests that "the principles for tutoring and tutor training [he outlines] need to be tested, need to be studied" (434). Yet these principles have not been tested.

In essence, North's principles have been accepted wholesale and canonized, despite his suggestion that they be studied. But the results of this study begin to indicate

that though North's principles have been canonized, they may not reflect practice and may require the very testing North advocates in his article. In addition, the results of this study indicate a need to further investigate tutor attitudes. It is critical that both theory and practice be researched with the goal of refining both. The current theory may not meet the needs of all writers or all writing centers. Tutor attitudes may provide some insight into what methods do meet the needs for all writers. Because tutors tutor primarily with the methods and attitudes modeled to them, such an investigation would be conducive to a better understanding of the realities of the field as a whole. A further investigation could also illuminate the reasons that writing centers seem to privilege creative writing as an act reserved for advanced writers, and how that privilege creates privilege and disadvantage for writers at all levels. It could also reveal how that privileging affects student, faculty, and administrative attitudes toward writing centers.

In retrospect, Beth Boquet's history seems to trace the arc-swing of a pendulum in writing center methods: At one extreme is the medicinal clinic/fix-it shop and at the other the completely non-directive, hands-off method. Research and testing of methods along the gamut of possibilities could help to close some of the current gap between writing center canonized theory of methods and writing center tutor attitudes and behaviors—a change that could help writing center professionals to better meet the needs of all writers. For though our ideals should always be greater than what we can truly accomplish, our goals must always be to come as close to the ideals as possible.

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Survey Invitation**

The following is a copy of the invitation that was sent out on WCENTER, the Writing Center elist:

Dear Centaurs,

I'm currently working on a graduate Thesis in Rhetoric and Composition. The focus of my thesis is tutor attitudes toward creative writers in the center. I have created a survey to gather information about this. Anyone (at any level) who tutors in any kind of writing center is invited to take the survey, whether he/she has worked with creative writers or not.

The survey is completely anonymous. It does not ask for names, nor does it track email addresses. I'd like to invite you all (and all of your tutors who are interested) to participate in the survey. Your responses are greatly appreciated. Just click on the link below to enter the survey.

<http://www.SurveyMonkey.com/s.asp?u=29262410101>

Thanks,

Leah F. Cassorla

Graduate Consultant, USF Writing Center

Member-at-Large, SWCA Executive Board

## Appendix B: Flowchart of Survey

The Survey Flowchart follows the order of survey questions included below:

Survey Questions:

### Section 1: Demographics

1. Sex
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
2. Age (please use whole numbers only)<sup>17</sup>
3. I am a:
  - a. Grade 9-12 Student
  - b. Undergraduate Student
  - c. Master's Student
  - d. Doctoral Candidate
  - e. Faculty Member
  - f. Staff Member
  - g. Professional Consultant
  - h. Other (please specify)
4. In what kind of institution is your writing center housed (i.e. K-12, 2-year college, technical, 4-year regional etc.)?

---

<sup>17</sup> One respondent wrote in "Eighteen." This response was changed to the integer 18 for use in the database.

5. How long have you been tutoring in a writing center or other tutoring facility?
  - a. <1 year
  - b. 1-5 years
  - c. 6-10 years
  - d. 10-15 years
  - e. 16-20 years
  - f. >20 years

## Section 2: Definitions

6. How do you define creative writing?
7. Do you consider yourself a creative writer? (Navigation question)
  - a. Yes (Respondents who chose this option continued to the next question)
  - b. No (Respondents who chose this option skipped to the next section)
8. What kind of creative writing do you do?
9. Please describe and evaluate your writing process.

## Section 3: Tutoring creative writers

10. Have you tutored creative writers in a writing center? (Navigation question)
  - a. Yes (Respondents who chose this option continued to the next question)
  - b. No (Respondents who chose this option skipped to section 4)
11. What kind of writers have you tutored?



- a. Poets
- b. Fiction Writers
- c. Creative Non-Fiction Writers
- d. More than one of the above (Navigated to screen that asked questions 21-32)
- e. Other (please specify)—(Navigated to screen that asked questions 30-32)

12. Were you comfortable tutoring a poet?

- a. Yes
- b. No

13. Please describe your most positive experience tutoring a poet.

14. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a poet.

15. Were you comfortable tutoring a fiction writer?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring a fiction writer.

17. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a fiction writer.

18. Were you comfortable tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction?

- a. Yes
- b. No

19. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction.

20. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction.

21. Were you comfortable tutoring a poet?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I haven't tutored a poet (if you choose this option, skip the next two questions)
22. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring a poet.
23. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a poet.
24. Were you comfortable tutoring a fiction writer?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I haven't tutored a fiction writer (if you choose this option, skip the next two questions)
25. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring a fiction writer.
26. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a fiction writer.
27. Were you comfortable tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I haven't tutored a writer of creative non-fiction (if you choose this option, skip the next two questions)
28. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction.
29. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring a writer of creative non-fiction.

30. Were you comfortable tutoring this kind of writer?

- a. Yes
- b. No

31. Please describe your most successful experience tutoring this kind of writer.

32. Please describe your most difficult experience tutoring this kind of writer.

#### Section 4: Expected comfort level for those who haven't tutored creative writers

33. Would you feel comfortable working with creative writers?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (Please Specify)

34. Please explain (or expand on) your previous answer.

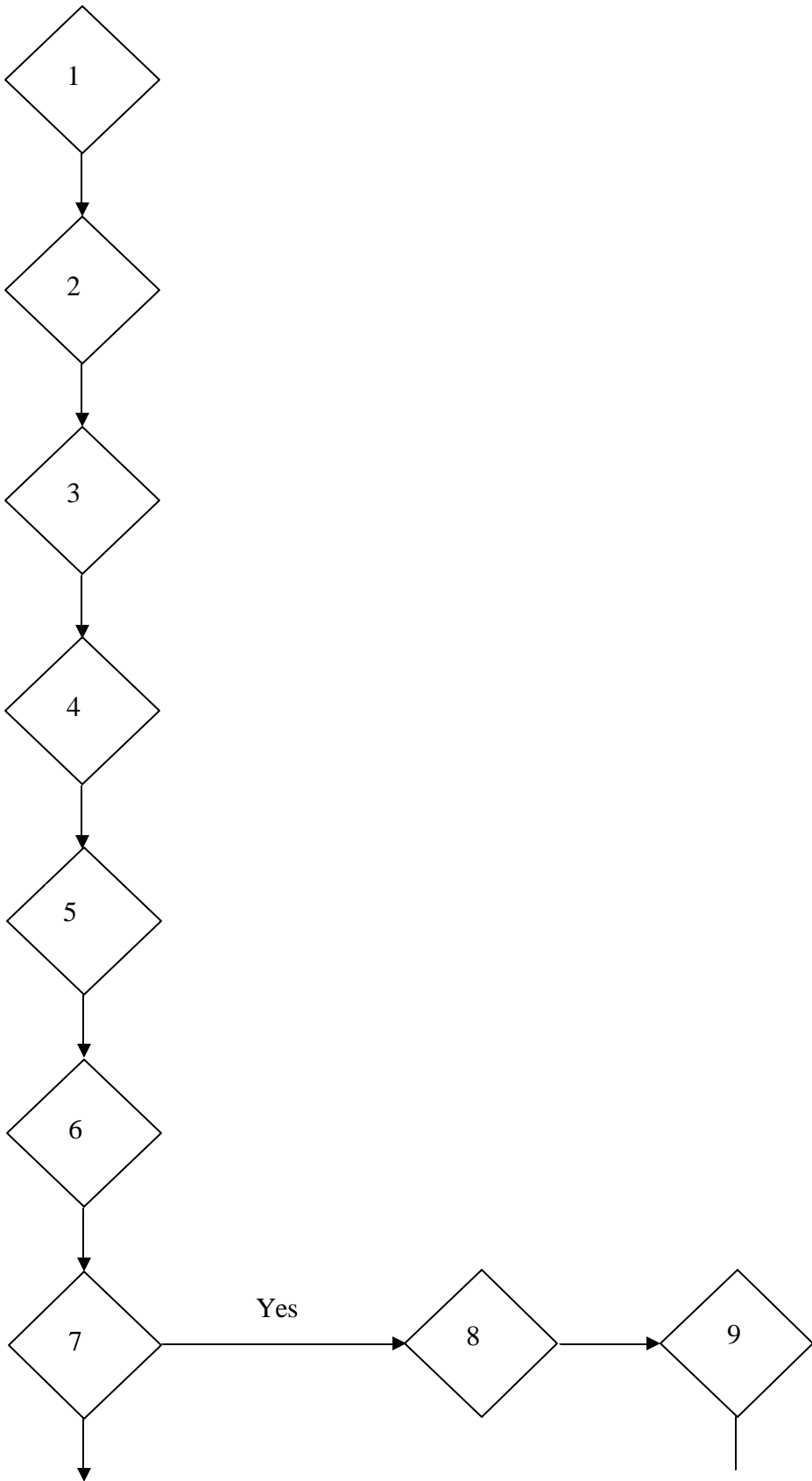
#### Section 5: Training

35. What training do you have for working with creative writers?

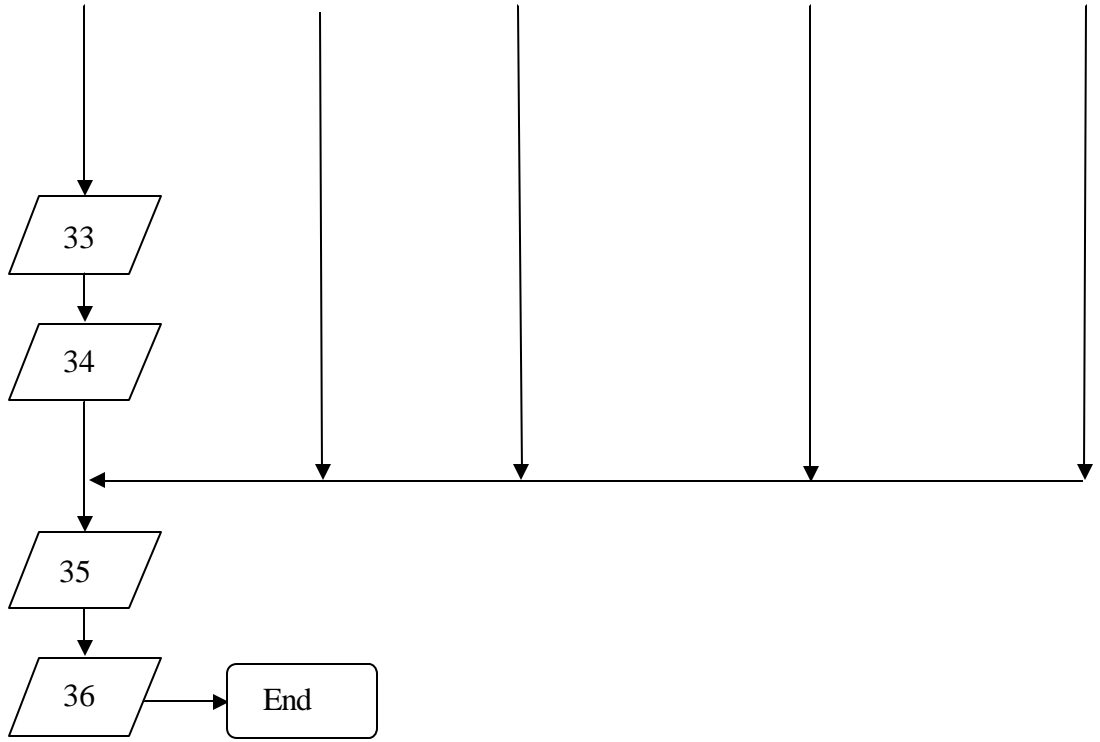
36. How would you suggest tutors be trained to tutor creative writers?

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. I appreciate your feedback.

Thanks again! Leah Cassorla







## Works Cited

- Arkin, Marian. "Special Projects in LaGuardia's Writing Center." Writing Lab Newsletter 3.2 (1978): 3.
- Bishop, Wendy. Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing it Down, Writing it Up, and Reading it. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1999.
- Boquet, Elizabeth H. "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions." College Composition and Communication 50.3 (1999): 463-82.
- Butler, Laura. "[wcenter] creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 3 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.
- . "[wcenter] Re: creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 4 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.
- Devenish, Alan. "Decentering the Writing Center." Writing Lab Newsletter 18.1 (1993): 4-7.
- Farrell, Pamela. "Guest Artists Add Reverence for Writing." Writing Lab Newsletter 15.8 (1991): 7-8.
- Hime, Jennifer E. and Karen J. Mowrer. "Eight Ways to Tutor Creative Writers." The Dangling Modifier. 10.1 (2003)  
<[http://www.ulc.psu.edu/Dangling\\_Modifier/Articles/Fall-2003\\_web-Eight\\_Ways.htm](http://www.ulc.psu.edu/Dangling_Modifier/Articles/Fall-2003_web-Eight_Ways.htm)> 2 April 2004.

- LeBlanc, Diane. "Teaching Creative Writing in Writing Centers." Writing Lab Newsletter 19.9 (1995): 1-4.
- Lerner, Neal. "[wcenter] Re: creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 8 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.
- MacNealy, Mary Sue. Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing. New York: Longman, 1999.
- Mason, R., Lind, D., Marchal, B., Statistical Techniques in Business and Economics. Special Edition Series: University of Phoenix. Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill, 1999
- Merrill, Laura. "[wcenter] Re: creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 4 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.
- Newman, Sylvia. "[wcenter] Re: creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 3 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.
- North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." College English 46.5 (1984):443-46.
- . ""Training Tutors to Talk About Writing." College Composition and Communication 33.4 (1982): 434-41.
- OEDOnline. 2004. Oxford English Dictionary. 9 June 2004. <<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.usf.edu/>>.
- Plumb, Carolyn and Jan H. Spyridakis. "Survey Research in Technical Communication: Designing and Administering Questionnaires." Technical Communication 39.4 (1992): 625-638.



Pobo, Kenneth. "Creative Writing and the Writing Center." Writing Lab Newsletter. 15.6 (1991): 5-7.

Truscott, Robert Blake. "Tutoring the Advanced Writer in a Writing Center." Writing Lab Newsletter 9.10 (1985): 14-16.

Zenger, Amy. "[wcenter] Re: creative writing in the writing center." Online Posting. 4 March 2004. WCENTER. <[http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text\\_mode=0&lang=english](http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=wcenter&text_mode=0&lang=english)>.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Katherine H., and John L. Adams. "The Creative Writing Workshop and the Writing Center." Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center. Ed. Joan A. Mullin and Ray Wallace. Urbana: NCTE, 1994. 19-24.
- Birnbaum, Lisa. "Becoming a Creative Writing Center." Writing Lab Newsletter 20.10 (1996): 6-7.
- Bishop, Wendy. "Teaching Undergraduate Creative Writing: Myths, Mentors and Metaphors." Journal of Teaching Writing. 7 (1988): 83-102.
- Freisinger, Randall R. "Creative Writing and Creative Composition." College English. 40.3 (1978): 283-87.
- Harris, Muriel. "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors." College English 57.1 (1995): 27-42.
- Hollis, Karyn L. "Feminism in Writing Workshops: A New Pedagogy." College Composition and Communication. 43 (1992): 340-48.
- Lardner, Ted. "Locating the Boundaries of Composition and Creative Writing." College Composition and Communication. 51.1 (1999): 72-77.
- Mandel, Barrett, J. "The Writer Writing is Not at Home." College Composition and Communication. 31.4 (1980): 370-77.
- Maloney Grimm, Nancy. "Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center." College Composition and Communication. 47.4 (1996): 523-48.
- Strang, Steven. "Product and Process: The Author-Led Workshop." College Composition and Communication. 35.3 (1984): 327-33.
- Welch, Nancy. "Playing with Reality: Writing Centers After the Mirror Stage." College Composition and Communication. 51.1 (1999): 51-69.