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The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward

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In June of 2024, the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland, hosted the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) bi-annual conference on the theme: “The Future of Writing Centers”. Looking back, we recall that in 2010 one of our guest editors, Anja Poloubotko presented the results of her bachelor thesis, titled “Problems of Writing Center Work in Europe and Beyond: An Analysis Based on a European Survey in Relation to Writing Center Literature” to her first EWCA conference audience in Paris. The survey showed that at that time, writing centers in Europe were already facing similar challenges to writing centers in the US (e.g. financial limitations, lack of acknowledgement, etc.). Additional problems such as misconception and undervaluation, which were also prominent in the writing center literature in the United States (e.g. North 1984) at the time, could have been linked to a broader issue, an image problem (as proofreading facility) of writing centers. Today, in 2025, in this new transformative phase in the age of AI, we have the chance to shape our image and to reinvent ourselves by strengthening what a new writing center generation is about, starting in the 1970s in the US and in the 1990s and 2000s in Europe: the writer and all the skills that are being acquired by going through the cognitively and emotionally complex (multilingual) writing process.

Concurring with the 40th anniversary of Stephen North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center” (1984), the 2024 EWCA conference invited participants to take stock of regional and transnational directions in writing center research or practice and reimagine writing centers moving forward. A re-assessment of our idea of a writing center is inspired by a recognition that the US model, its pedagogical theories and practices, so profoundly influenced by Murray (1972) and North (1982, 1984) might not so easily apply beyond Anglo-American academic cultures. In 2009, Tracy Santa (2009), co-founder of the EWCA, reflected on his experience as a writing center administrator at the American University of Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, as he struggled to reconcile the advice of US tutor training manuals with the local institutional and cultural contexts in Europe. A year earlier, Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner (2008) examined the outsized influence of Stephen North’s (1984) “The Idea of a Writing Center,” which no longer aligned with writing center research and practice. Five years later, Jackie Grutch McKinney (2013) extended this debate, criticizing the “writing center grand narrative,” namely that writing centers are “cozy homes,” “iconoclastic,” and places that tutor “all students” (pp. 3–4), asking us to examine who these “ideas” of a writing center include and what practices or reimaginings they exclude. Recent studies of first-generation students, speakers of English as second or foreign language, and working-class students, for example,

show that common writing center practices do not necessarily serve all students equally well (e. g., Bond, 2019; Denny, Nordlof & Salem, 2018; Eckstein, 2019; Salazar 2021; Salem 2016).

Presenters at the 2024 EWCA Conference were asked to consider how local practices or narratives were accommodated when establishing their 'Ideas' of a writing center. Attendees were invited to speak on a number of topics, to consider whether the traditional narrative about what writing centers are and what they do still coheres with our current contexts. How, for instance, writing centers are impacted by neoliberal policies, including globalization–multiculturalism in the writing center, multilingualism, neo-colonial university expansion, neoliberal pedagogical values that are inconsistent with traditional writing center values, austerity, marginalization of writing center staff and scholarship, the nature of work and wellness in the writing center, and the impact of new technologies on writing center work.

Three months after the 2024 EWCA Conference, Franziska Liebetanz worked with the editors of *Journal für Schreibwissenschaft* (*Journal of Writing Studies*) to organize this English-language edition, titled “The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward” that celebrates and extends the conversations initiated at the 2024 conference in Limerick.

Today, *JoSch*, the *Journal for Writing Studies* (*Journal für Schreibwissenschaft*) is delighted to announce the publication of its second edition in English. *JoSch* has been a significant journal for writing research and didactics in Germany for over 10 years. Each year, *JoSch* releases two issues, with more than 600 copies sold annually. In our commitment to accessibility, the journal is transitioning to complete open access, allowing a wider audience to engage with *JoSch* and its content. This shift not only fosters a broader discourse on writing research and didactics but also emphasizes the importance of publishing in English. By doing so, *JoSch* editors aim to include participants from across Europe and showcase the diversity present within the continent to English-speaking countries.

Our goal is to encourage writing center scholars everywhere to share their work in English, enhancing the visibility of Writing Center initiatives throughout Europe. This initiative seeks to bridge the gap between the US and Europe, ultimately reaching a larger audience. The future of writing centers is not merely a German concern; it is a European, if not global, issue. By publishing in English, we facilitate a more accessible and enriching dialogue for a diverse readership. It is the hope of all those involved in the production of this special issue of *JoSch* that the contributions published here (see abstracts below) will reach a far wider audience through its presentation in English.

Christin Campbell, Tara Keenan-Thomson, Theresa Lindo and Nicoletta Romano will give us an insight into how the demographics of higher education are changing their University in Rome. The John Cabot University is adapting to the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on writing and research, with its Writing Center facing unique challenges due to the diverse skills of its student body and Italian labor laws that restrict staffing to faculty tutors. To address these challenges, the Writing Center collaborates with the Library and Center for Teaching and Learning to offer workshops on information and AI literacy and

has published a Strengthening Guide, positioning itself to effectively integrate AI into the writing process.

AI-supported writing comes with several advantages but may also be a cause for deskilling cognitive abilities. In their survey among university students, Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt (2024) found a connection between strong writing skills and a more reflected AI use. Based on these findings, the article from **Helena Grünbaum** “AI and the Brain. Reflections on Writing Skills in the Light of AI” article will answer the question of how participants in the survey address fears of deskilling cognitive abilities and in what way these fears relate to a strong fondness for writing in their own words. A mixed methods approach shows that students who express fears of deskilling tend to have a higher writing proficiency and fondness of their own style. The discussion addresses the potential role of writing centers in preventing deskilling.

Lena Leimgruber explores in her article “From Pencil to Prompt: Navigating AI in the Future of Writing Centres” how writing centres can adapt to the growing influence of AI tools like ChatGPT, following discussions from the 2024 EWCA conference. The aim is to contextualise these insights within the context of the Chalmers Writing Centre (CWC) at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg (Sweden) to explore how they can inform future development of writing centres. The report highlights the importance of writing centres evolving as hubs for AI literacy and future skills (Kotsiou et al. 2022). Drawing on discussions about AI at the Peer Tutor Day and conference presentations about AI, the article reflects on the future of European writing centres in an age of digital transformation. The structure covers keynote insights, relevant conference presentations and actionable take-aways for improving practices at CWC and beyond.

While the first comprehensive survey of German writing centers conducted in 2023 revealed that 71% of the respondents were at least partially funded permanently, answers to the final open-ended question, which asked respondents to assess the current status of their writing center, revealed a less positive assessment of the establishment of writing centers. The article from **Fridrun Freise** and **Nora Hoffmann** analyzes these statements and contextualizes them with the corresponding quantitative findings, covering the thematic categories of institutional placement, resources, offerings, demands and statements on issues relevant to writing centers. The result is an ambivalent picture of positive and negative aspects of the current status of German writing centers.

Academic Writing Instructor **Eunhee Buettner** and Writing Center Coordinator **Helen Lepp Friesen** at the University of Winnipeg, Canada, along with four of their undergraduate peer tutors, **Breanna Markiewicz**, **Alvena Ali Wasim**, **Jia Custodio**, **Wenjia Bao** respond to the changing demographics of the student population, assessing the impact of the dominant Western notions about how people learn to write and the practices best suited to achieving that goal on multilingual tutors’ writing center practices and multilingual student writers’ identities. In **Writing Reimagined: Decolonizing Academic Writing in a Writing Center** the authors suggest that decolonizing academic writing pedagogy is essen-

tial if future writing centers are to accommodate an inevitably more diverse demographic of student clientele and potential tutors, i. e., if they are to communicate equity and inclusivity.

Writing centers can play a key role in developing universities as multilingual organizations, enhancing access to languages and multilingualism. They support multilingual writing and language skills. Sandra **Drumm's paper** "Multilingualism in the Writing Center Work" explores multilingualism, particularly the impact of language switching on working memory during writing. It also reviews data from writing centers in Germany that adopt a multilingual approach. The findings suggest that enabling individuals to strategically choose from their language repertoire is essential. Additionally, using all languages can boost self-confidence and reduce cognitive strain in the writing process.

Andrea Scott draws with her own interdisciplinary theories of care to offer writing professionals a new way of theorizing academic writing and its support in German-speaking countries. The concept of care is a powerful lens for reframing writing as a social practice based on relational values like interdependence, connection, and curiosity. At the same time, the concept of care points upward to structures of inequality shaping academic labor in our field. Such a perspective on writing and writing care work invites renewed reflection on questions of growing importance post-pandemic: what structures enable or disable care for academic writers? And how can we build or strengthen infrastructure that helps writers and writing professionals thrive?

The book review from **Stefanie Everke Buchanan** examines *Booksprints in der Hochschullehre: Schreiben lernen im Team* (2024), a volume that explores the use of booksprints as an innovative didactic format in higher education. The book presents booksprints as structured, collaborative writing processes that foster both academic writing skills and transferable competencies relevant to professional fields. While emphasizing writing as a means of learning, the authors also address the challenges of integrating booksprints into university curricula, including assessment regulations and group dynamics. The volume balances theoretical insights with practical guidance, offering materials for implementation. Despite some complexities in terminology and structure, the book effectively demonstrates the benefits of booksprints, particularly in enhancing student engagement, collaboration, and social integration. Ultimately, the review highlights the book's value for educators seeking to implement innovative and student-centered writing pedagogies.

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Guesteditors

Lawrence Cleary co-directed the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland from 2007 to 2019 and has been sole Director since. He was an At-Large Board Member in the IWCA from 2022–2022. Lawrence served on the EWCA Executive Board from 2016–2024, serving as Chair from 2022–2024 and hosting the 2024 EWCA Conference in Limerick. He has published in Ireland, the U.K., and in the U.S. He is currently working on a volume of the *Writing Lab Newsletter's Digital Edited Collections* to be published by the WAC Clearinghouse in 2026.

Franziska Liebetanz is Co-director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Writing Center at the European University Viadrina in Germany. She served on the EWCA Executive Board from 2014–2024, serving as Chair from 2016–2022. Franziska also served the board of

the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) and the German Association for writing research and didactics (gefsus). She is co-founder of JoSch – Journal of Writing Research (since 2008). Since 2006 she has been involved with writing didactics and research.

Anja Poloubotko, M.A. has been the coordinator of *Team InterWRITE* at the Leibniz Language Centre at Leibniz University Hannover since 2015. She first joined the board of the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) as a peer tutor in 2014 and has been a member since 2022. She has been involved in writing center work and research since 2010. Her bachelor thesis focused on the challenges of writing centers in Europe and beyond. In her master's thesis, she analyzed the contribution of peer writing tutors to the sustainable development of writing centers in Germany. Other research interests include multilingual writing and tutoring and the role of AI.