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

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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. This article 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 institutionalization at German writing centers. Gastherausgebende: Lawrence Cleary, Franziska Liebetanz, Anja Poloubotko

Statements on the Development Status of German Writing Centers

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Fridrun Freise & Nora Hoffmann

Abstract

While the first comprehensive survey of German writing centers conducted in 2023 (Hoffmann/Freise 2024) 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. This article 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 institutionalization at German writing centers.

Introduction

German writing support facilities (WSF) have spread quickly over the past 30 years. While Bielefeld and Bochum were the first to introduce the US-American concept of writing centers to Germany in the 1990s, many new WSF have been established with third-party funding from the Quality Pact for Teaching since 2012. Studies conducted in 2015/16 (Bromley 2023) and 2017 (Hoffmann 2019) found 85 WSF in Germany (Bromley 2023: 13) and 70 WSF in other German-speaking countries (Hoffmann 2019: 16). After this startup boom, the future of German WSF seemed uncertain at the end of the temporary funding by the Quality Pact for Teaching in 2020 that financed at least 43 % of the centers fully or partly (Hoffmann 2017: 22). To find out how many WSF remained after 2020, how secure their operations were, and the scope of their activities, we conducted the first comprehensive Germany wide survey of WSF in 2023 (Hoffmann/Freise 2024).

Our study revealed a high number of 146 WSF in Germany, which Bromley (2024) also highlights as the country with the strongest increase in writing centers outside the US between 2015/16 and 2022/23. In addition, our study found that 71 % of the 77 German WSF that participated in our survey were (at least partially) funded permanently. While these quantitative results suggest a positive development at first glance, an examination of the final free-text question, which asked respondents to assess the current status of their WSF without any restrictive specifications, revealed that the descriptions of the WSFs situation were not unanimously positive. In addition to the favorable assessments of the WSFs estab-

lishment status, there were notably disparate assessments, including those of temporarily funded WSF, which responded markedly critically. Thus, institutional work (Girgensohn 2018: 12 f.) remains an ongoing task in German writing centers – just as in American centers, as Girgensohn (2017) has shown.

The present article aims to add an additional, relativizing perspective to the quantitative results of our survey of German WSF by analyzing the final free-text responses written by WSF staff and thereby to provide a more detailed understanding of the current status of German WSF and their potential for future development. We will first present a brief overview of the complete survey as a background. Next, we will focus on the analysis of the free-text responses, which will be contextualized with the corresponding quantitative findings. This analysis will cover the following thematic categories: institutional placement, financial and staff resources, range of services, statements and requests regarding the current status, and statements on topics relevant to WSF. Finally, the results will be interpreted and evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to the field of writing center research and their significance for possible future developments of German WSF.

Data Collection and Main Quantitative Findings

While Hoffman/Freise (2024) describe the theoretical background, data collection process and quantitative results of our study in detail, we will only provide a brief overview of these aspects here as background for the analysis of the final free-text question. As our study represents the first comprehensive attempt to systematically document all writing support facilities at German universities (see Hoffmann 2019 for a previous study conducted in Germany and Bromley 2023 for an international study), we employed a two-step data collection process. Firstly, we conducted a keyword search on the websites of all 423 German universities listed in the University Directory published by the German Conference of University Presidents[1] and hereby identified 146 WSF. Secondly, we invited those WSF via email to participate in an online survey in March 2023.

The online survey was conducted using a self-developed questionnaire (see Hoffmann/ Freise 2024) which covered the following themes mostly by predefined response options: distribution of WSF across different types of university, institutional placement at university, WSF's resources (financial, personnel, and physical space), range of services, target groups, and research activities. The open-ended free-text question, the results of which are presented here, concluded the survey.

The timing of the survey in the spring of 2023 took into account the possible stabilization phase after the expiration of the Quality Pact for Teaching, and thus the end of an extensive, third-party-funded boom in the establishment of WSF in Germany. Also, the sur-

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1   "all universities as TXT-file", downloaded from: https://www.hochschulkompass.de/hochschulen/downloads. html (accessed on November 1st, 2022).

vey fell in the first semester after the publication of ChatGPT (Nov 2022), and thus coincided with the hype about changes concerning academic writing and thus the work of WSF triggered by artificial intelligence (AI).

Table 1
Statistical Data of the Survey – a Basic Overview

Sample	Institutional Placement
Internet search at all German universities (n = 423)* for WSF by keyword search on university websites ▸ result: n = 146 WSF (contacted via email with request to participate in online survey in March 2023) ▸ response rate: 53 % (77 of the 146 contacted WSF): • 51 % WSF at state universities • 38 % WSF at state universities of applied sciences • 3 % WSF at state universities of education • 8 % WSF at other types of universities (e. g. private) * Cf. footnote 1.	**Location of WSF:** • 32 %: independent central institutions • 46 %: affiliated with a central institution (library, language center, student advising office, key skills center, teaching and learning center) • 16 %: located in a department or faculty • 15 %: located in a department or faculty in the humanities or social sciences • 5 %: dual location – central and departmental
Financial and Staff Resources	**Range of Services**
Financial resources (institution and staff positions): • 56 %: permanently funded • 15 %: partly permanent, partly temporarily funded • 17 %: temporarily funded • 12 %: no answer **Staff at WSF:** • 52 %: students (working average: 9 % of a fulltime position) • 15 %: academic staff (working average: 61 % of a fulltime position) • 12 %: administrative staff (working average: 52 % of a fulltime position) • 3 %: lecturer (working average: 75 % of a fulltime position) • 21 %: others (0.5 % professors, 20.5 % various types of contractors)	**Services for students in responding WSF:** • 94 %: workshops • 87 %: writing consultations • 76 %: writing events • 56 %: seminars • 45 %: writing consultation training **Services for teaching staff in responding WSF:** • 46 %: counseling • 42 %: writing pedagogical support for courses • 35 %: workshops • 17 %: writing fellow programs

77 of the 146 WSF contacted completed the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 53 %. The sample includes WSF at all types of university almost proportionally to the distribution of these types in the total number of universities with WSF contacted (cf. Table 1, and Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 256 f.).

Analysis of the Free Text Question

The open-ended question evaluated here aimed at individual thematic and emotional assessments of the current state of development of one's own WSF:

> *"Please complete the following sentence and explain your statement in a few sentences when needed: Beyond pure data: When I think about the current state of development of my WSF in comparison to five years ago, I feel..."*

As the question does not direct the focus of the answer thematically, the general topics addressed can serve as indicators of which issues are currently important and how they affect WSF. The following analysis stands on its own and serves as a preliminary study for a qualitative interview-study with WSF on their development to date and possible future perspectives, identifying relevant topics for the interview guide.

Statements from the free-text response were coded in an inductive qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2022: 68–103) in four rounds by three encoders with regard to their thematic content and their emotional-evaluative attitude.[2] The content found was first labeled, explicated thematically and summarized into larger categories. Then the text basis was evaluated again using the condensed analysis grid. Finally, the frequency of occurrence of the individual categories was determined (cf. tables 2–5), and coded statements were classified into their discourse contexts using the anchor examples (cf. Mayring 2022: 96) presented.

Emotions were coded separately, initially using a simple grid (positive, neutral, negative) for each statement. However, as it became apparent that the results were based on subjective interpretations, we abandoned the grid and referred only to emotions explicitly mentioned (cf. footnote 13).

The statements can be considered to be representative. 70 out of 77 respondents (90.9 %) answered the final open-ended question. In many cases, the themes addressed can be traced back, at least indirectly, to the fields of the WSF's work surveyed in the quantitative part of the questionnaire, but further topics also become visible.

We will first present statements on the topics of institutional placement, financial and staff resources, and the range of services, and contextualize them with corresponding quantitative results. Subsequently, assessments of the current situation as well as themes relevant to the work of WSF will be examined.

Institutional Placement

As the quantitative data concerning the institutional placement shows, approximately 3/4 of the WSF are either independent central institutions (34 %) or affiliated with one (46 %, e. g.,

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2   We would like to thank Anna Tilmans for preliminary coding.

libraries or language centers). 16 % of the WSF are located in a department – most of them in the humanities and social sciences (15 %), primarily in language departments (7 %). 5 % of WSF have a dual location – central and departmental (cf. Table 1, for details see Hoffmann/ Freise 2024: 258 f.).

The analysis of the free-texts allows for further differentiation, as they most frequently evaluate the stability of the institutional placement and the associated support of the WSF.

Table 2
Narratives on Institutional Placement

themes	amount	example	case No.
stable institutional placement	6	"We are more firmly anchored in the university structures, which has advantages (e. g. expertise is requested, visibility) and disadvantages (e. g. loss of autonomy)."	22
growing recognition/ establishment	5	"that the WSF is better recognized and is slowly but steadily becoming more established."	40
lack of institutional support	6	"less support from the university management."	20
		"I am very slowed down in terms of content or personnel and staff resources in view of the needs of the students in the various departments."	54
		"However, I am annoyed that after so many years, the persuasion and education work has not been completed. In addition, we still have to explain what our tasks are and why we are 'needed' or 'required'."	32
from departmental to central placement	2	"Five years ago, the WSF at our university was still a project of a department with one temporary employee. Now it is a central institution with one permanent and two temporary employees."	58
writing in the disciplines	2	"Slowly, the change from pure additional workshops to integration into teaching in the disciplines began."	69

Six times the institutional placement is positively described as stable (see e. g. Table 2, No. 22). With similar frequency (5 times), respondents are pleased about the growing recognition or establishment of their institution at the university (e. g. Table 2, No. 40). However, about as often as these two positive aspects, the lack of institutional support is also mentioned (6 times), which can manifest itself in a lack of support, a feeling of being slowed down in terms of content or financial and staff resources, or a need to justify the work of the WSF (e. g. Table 2, Nos. 20, 54, 32).

In addition to these general assessments of the situation of the WSF, the responses address the tension between departmentalization and centralization from two different perspectives. Twice WSF staff report that their WSF has evolved from a departmental facility to a central institution (e. g. Table 2, No. 58). The didactic aspect is also addressed: here it is

emphasized that there has been a development from general workshops to cooperation with departments with the aim of supporting writing in the disciplines (2x, e. g. Table 2, No. 69).

Financial and Staff Resources

In this section we look at the funding status of WSF and differentiate subgroups by cost type. The quantitative results show that 56 % of the WSF (n = 77) were permanently funded, 15 % were funded by a combination of permanent and temporary sources, while 17 % relied on temporary funding. In 75 % of the (partially) permanently funded WSF (n = 55) positions were permanently funded; in 18 % the institution was permanently funded; in 7 % both the positions and the institution were permanently funded (Table 1). The focus on the staff resources reveals that the size of the responding WSF varies greatly. 25 % (n = 55) have less than one full-time equivalent (FTE), the majority (44 %) has 1 to 1.9 FTE, and only 5.5 % work with 5 or more FTE.[3] The calculated total FTE for individual employee groups, when compared with the number of employees, also shows that many employees do not have full-time positions. For example, the average working time among academic staff (15 % of staff) is 61 % of a FTE (cf. Table 1).

The narratives on financial and staff resources that complement these findings can be roughly divided into those that deal with the expansion and further development of the WSF and those that describe its reduction.

Table 3
Narratives on Financial and Staff Resources

themes		amount	example	case No.
expansion	made permanent	16	"Within 5 years, we have grown from 0.5 positions to 3 permanent full-time positions plus 8 student assistants with a total of 120h/week."	17
	new foundation	8	"I'm where I wanted to be. There is now an WSF at my university and I have the job. Now the development can begin."	5
			"We didn't exist five years ago."	46
	expansion/ extension	7	"Our situation has become more natural, our colleagues count on us. We have also grown in size, we have a stable group of three student assistants who we are constantly training."	13

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3   In addition, 13 % dispose of 2 to 2.9 FTE, 7 % dispose of 3 to 3.9 FTE, and 5.5 % dispose of 4 to 4.9 FTE.

(Continuing Table 3)

themes		amount	example	case No.
reduction	lack of support	6	"not sufficiently equipped, as I run a graduate academy and offer writing consultation and groups myself regularly every 14 days for 4 groups, but the demand is significantly higher."	55
	cut/ reduction	5	"lonely and broke, since my 75 % position – now integrated into another department – is the perpetual remnant of a large writing center with 5 staff members, a 120-hour writing consultancy, and a large Writing Fellow program."	11
	closing	2	"Unfortunately, the WSF will be discontinued in the middle of the year."	69
	secondary task	2	"This seems to be the place to say something about my particular situation. I am solely responsible for academic writing at this technical university, and only on a part-time basis, so to speak."	2
	more complex tasks/unchanged resources	1	"very frustrated by the fact that the institution's tasks have become more and more complex, but the equipment with positions (1x50 %) and student assistant hours (60/month) has not changed."	3

In the area of expansion, three blocks of themes are repeated: 16 respondents state that their WSF have been made permanently funded. This includes statements on the new permanent funding of the institution as well as of individual positions (see Table 3, No. 17). The new foundation of a WSF is also mentioned positively in eight cases (see Table 3, No. 5 and 46). Seven responses concern the expansion or extension of a WSF (cf. e. g. Table 3, No. 13).

The area of reduction can be differentiated into significantly more individual phenomena. First and foremost, the lack of support (6 times) with regard to resources and institutional support is stated (see Table 3, No. 55 and Table 2, No. 20, 54. 32). Job cuts or a reduction in work capacity are mentioned five times (see, e. g. Table 3, No. 11). Two other respondents each describe the tasks of the WSF as secondary tasks and thus as poorly staffed (see e. g. Table 3, No. 2). One statement deals with unchanged resources in spite of increasingly complex tasks (cf. Table 3, No. 3). Finally, two respondents announced the imminent closure of their WSF (cf. e. g. Table 3, No. 69).

Range of Services

The quantitative analysis shows that students are the main target group of WSF services, being addressed by 97.1 % of WSF. 50 % also aim at teaching staff. Among the services, extra-curricular support for students (and in part also for doctoral students) are mentioned first.

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The support includes workshops (94 % of the WSF), writing consultations (87 %), writing events (76 %), and seminars (56 %). Writing consultation training is offered by 45 % of the WSF. Services for teaching staff – as multipliers in the field of literacy education – are mainly counseling (at 46 % of the WSF), writing pedagogical support for courses (at 42 %), workshops (at 35 %) and writing fellow programs (at 17 %) (cf. Table 1, for details see Hoffmann/ Freise 2024: 259–262).

Table 4
Narratives on the Services of the WSF

themes	amount	example	case No.
professionalization of services	6	"On the one hand, we have achieved a more stable position in the Language Center, and, on the other, we have become more professional and modern."	13
expansion of services, content or expertise	4	"that we have continued to develop by expanding our services and range of offers and have gained expertise within the team."	18
increase or change in content needs	3	"a growing need to consult and train students with regard to the content, layout and academic requirements of thesis and term papers."	42
		"[We] have finally regained momentum after the pandemic. However, we need to realign ourselves to some extent and adapt to the changed needs of our clientele."	15
high/growing number of users	3	"At the moment, we are working to capacity with consultations and workshops for students, so there is hardly any time for strategic planning, expanding the program, etc."	70
supplementary service	1	"that it is a good service alongside the writing center: I coach students who don't write because of (anxiety) blocks."	44

Comments on WSF services most frequently deal with their overall perception: six respondents describe a professionalization of services (see e. g. Table 4, No. 13), four others the expansion of services, content or expertise (see e. g. Table 4, No. 18).

Another group of comments is about needs-based design: An increase (see Table 4, No. 42) or change in content needs (see Table 4, No. 15) with effects on the conceptual orientation of the WSF is mentioned three times. In addition, a growing number of users is mentioned three times (see e. g. Table 4, No. 70). One WSF, which exists next to another WSF, explicitly describes its offer as a target-group-specific supplementary service (cf. Table 4, No. 44).

Statements and Requests Regarding the Current Status

In addition to comments on individual aspects of the questionnaire, the responses to the free-text question also include assessments of the current situation at the WSF and wishes for the future.

Table 5
Statements and Requests Regarding the Current Status

themes	amount	example	case No.
lonely/alone	5	"more and more pressured to get everything under the famous one roof and very often stand alone – exchange would be brilliant – there is little time for that."	10
work to secure the existence of the WSF	3	"great relief that, thanks to the very smart planning of our department head, two positions could be made permanent and long-term financing of the student writing tutors could be made possible."	12
multiple demands (in addition to content work)	3	"quite grueling with the constant writing of concept papers, applications for third-party funding, letters of request to decision-makers at the university as well as the effort involved in updating the website and advertising materials and organizational tasks."	4
need for development	1	"need for development to adapt the content to current developments in AI."	68
teaching demands	1	"have a contract as a research assistant, but in fact work as a teacher."	2
opportunity to shape	1	"proud that we have managed the transition to online consulting as a team not just somehow and tediously, but that we have shaped it well and developed new, suitable forms of work and continue to develop them further."	37
long term instead of short term planning	1	"We can now plan and implement long-term and sustainable didactic writing support and no longer have to rely on short-term successes, high numbers, sensations, and flashes in the pan."	12
wishes: more conceptional work, research, projects	5	"that the WSF and its events are established and largely well known at the university, but that it is currently unable to develop new innovative and conceptual ideas due to staff shortages."	75
		"I would also like to have time for writing research."	4
		"desire to be able to carry out more projects again in addition to the established basic provisions."	47

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The descriptions of the current state of the WSF oscillate between positive and negative moods. The negative statements include the already mentioned responses that state a lack of support from other university institutions (6x, see e.g. Table 2, No. 20, 54, 32). In addition, five respondents describe their work as "lonely" or see themselves as "alone" in their responsibility for their tasks (cf. e.g. Table 5, No. 10). Other employees describe their work situation neutrally, but partly critically: Three times the extensive work to secure the existence of the WSF or corresponding management tasks are emphasized (see e.g. Table 5, No. 12). Three responses also mention the multiple demands of the work situation (see e.g. Table 5, No. 4). The mention of the need for further development to deal with AI (cf. Table 5, No. 68) points in the same direction, as well as statements describing the lack of time for research due to teaching demands (cf. Table 5, No. 2). Two positive descriptions of the current state of affairs are the opportunity to shape the future (cf. Table 5, No. 37) and the new situation of being able to plan for the long term instead of for the short term due to financial constraints (cf. Table 5, No. 12).

The wishes also relate to themes that affect the further design and the conceptual and scientific foundation of the WSF: One respondent would like to be able to design projects that go beyond the basic work (see Table 5, No. 47), three others would like to be able to work more conceptually (see e.g. Table 5, No. 75), and one would like to have more opportunities for research (see Table 5, No. 4).

Statements on Themes Relevant to WSF

Other opinions in the free-texts do not fall into one of the above-mentioned thematic areas but illustrate other issues that are on the minds of WSF staff, such as: AI (1), various individual didactic tasks (2) and their need orientated implementation (3). Further related themes are the development of WSF between conceptualizing and institutional necessities (4), university policy positions (5), and the commitment and emotions associated with WSF work (6). In the following, we will briefly outline these six themes.

(1) AI:

The expected disruption of writing by AI is mentioned most frequently. Four statements emphasize the need for development in writing pedagogy associated with AI (cf. Table 5, No. 68) as well as the expected increasing importance of WSF due to AI[4]. Furthermore, statements problematize that in a higher education context AI is perceived as a tool for automatic

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4   No. 33: "an increasing importance of WSF at universities, e.g. against the background of Covid-19 or currently Chat GPT".

text production and simplifying the writing process, while the necessary reflective didactics and testing are lacking.[5]

(2) Individual Didactic Tasks:

Various individual areas of WSF work are addressed, including writing in the disciplines (cf. Table 2, No. 69) or subfields of writing emphasized by single WSF as individually important themes, such as working with refugees,[6] specific requirements for thesis and term papers (cf. Table 4, No. 42), and requirements for writing in other languages, which are mentioned together with the desire for professional networking.[7]

(3) Needs-Based Orientation:

The needs-based orientation of the WSF, which is evident in the individualized services it offers, can also be found on another level. Smaller WSF in particular show how they make services possible at all through their specific focus and their own efforts. For example, one WSF integrates demand-oriented courses into the library's program;[8] a WSF, that is run by a single person describes the writing formats developed specifically for the university;[9] and another case describes the both uncertain and exciting pioneering work involved in establishing a WSF at an art college.[10]

(4) Development of WSF Between Conceptualization and Institutional Requirements:

In the longer-standing WSF, the issue of making things possible is also addressed at the concept level – a focus that has already emerged as central in the previous section (see Chapter 2.4). Statements frequently range on a spectrum from positive to critical and address the question of how a concept for a WSF that is both professionally sound and compatible with the institution's environment can be developed. One WSF member sees it as a positive devel-

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5 No. 53: "There seems to be a perception that academic writing can somehow be taught online through courses that require little human input. Personally, I believe that this is less the case than ever in the age of language-generating tools and that there is an urgent need for action."
No. 64: "Automation of text production through ChatGPT worsens the situation, as learners are deprived of strategic knowledge and laziness is encouraged. Texts produced last-minute via automated systems are of a low academic standard and in the long term are associated with a loss of academic quality and competitiveness of universities on an international scale. A rather worrying development. Nevertheless, chatbots and their advantages and disadvantages in text generation should be tested and included right now in order to evaluate the benefits of AI."
6 No. 8: "additional writing instruction for international refugee students [was] an important task."
7 No. 10: "My application for an exchange with a writing center abroad was rejected (although it would be appreciated if the WSF also worked in English."
8 No. 6: "The program runs alongside the library's program. Nevertheless, we manage to constantly align the program with demand and include new courses."
9 No. 2: "Over time […], I've developed my own methods, working mainly with students' own texts […], which are presented and discussed in the group. I also organize writing consultations (which are currently in high demand). I also take part in the Long Night Against Procrastination."
10 No. 77: "It is not clear what will happen next and the pioneering work at the art college is exciting, but also somewhat draining."

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opment that the working time of the academic staff is no longer spent solely on writing consultations for students, but also on working with multipliers and developing concepts.[11]

Another statement highlights the difficulty of maintaining a balance between provisions for writers and for multipliers as well as between conceptual and practical work. It also demonstrates how current conditions of an institutional environment can reduce a WSF to the exclusively practical work with writers in teaching and consulting:

> "[We] tend not to develop further. These factors include the service orientation and programmatic focus of the overarching unit and the expiring consolidation process of the university and the language center and the development policy of the current superiors. With regard to the fields of activity described by the German Society for Writing Didactics and Writing Research, we have had to focus very strongly on teaching and consultation for some time now. Thereby, all other fields of activity have been neglected." (No. 57)

The statement explicitly refers to the document outlining the activities of WSF published by the German Society for Writing Didactics and Writing Research (gefsus 2021) as a relevant reference point for the current didactic and conceptual design of a WSF. The inability to achieve this full range of activities agreed upon by the WSF community in one's own institution is described as an unwelcome stagnation in development.

Another statement emphasizes that the drafting of "concept papers" and third-party funding acquisition to ensure financial resources can be 'grueling' (see Table 5, No. 4) and, moreover, that the necessity of initially securing the existence of WSF can divert its operational capacity from the fulfillment of its "core tasks".[12]

In addition to these critical assessments, an ideal ratio of conceptual and practical work is also described. One respondent expresses satisfaction that, following the attainment of long-term financing with permanent positions, "long-term and sustainable" practical work is feasible, while for the previous non-permanent phase, the respondent describes a necessary actionism for the assurance of financing, which involved "short-term successes, [...] and flashes in the pan" (see Table 5, No. 12).

(5) Higher Education Policy Positions:
Some statements deal with the frequent tension between concept work for financial security and for a didactically appropriate organization of a WSF on the one hand, and the practical WSF work on the other hand, which is evidence that WSF are dependent on university poli-

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11   No. 43: "that the academic staff can now focus more of their working time on interaction (further training, advice, concept development) with multipliers and are no longer exclusively occupied with writing consultation for students. I think that's very good!"
12   No. 4: "The core tasks of writing advice, workshops, moderation of writing groups, training and supervision of writing tutors and development of didactic writing materials are thereby sometimes neglected."

tics. The following statement may be interpreted as both a specific political stance on the necessity for training on WSF work and on the institutional context.

> *"I don't think it's good to have workshops covered by external staff (teaching assignments) – because I can't see that we are helping to maintain precarious working conditions. [...] In the area of tutor training, however, I am also convinced that the relatively time-consuming one-semester training course [...] that I have designed makes a lot of sense and offers students a completely different opportunity to grow together, to reflect on their advisory role, their own writing and much more, throwing it in the trash and having it 'done' externally in two block days." (No. 53)*

The respondent is convinced of values, both at the institutional level and in the context of writing pedagogy, but that there are significant obstacles to implementing these standards within the institutional framework.

(6) Motivation and Emotion:

The aforementioned statement can also illustrate the fervor with which many of the expressed concerns are advocated. In accordance with the prompt to describe feelings concerning the current state, many respondents connect their statements with emotional or evaluative judgments. They express both joy at achievements thus far ("great joy", No. 67) and frustration or anger at unfulfilled requests ("I'm so angry I wish I could set off a nuclear bomb on our campus.", No. 53), while a tally of the statements that explicitly express feelings reveals a balance between positive and negative sentiments.[13] It can be concluded that the respondents have invested a great deal of motivation and energy in pursuing their concerns and that their expressed highly positive or negative emotions are due to their high dedication to their work.

Interpretation of Results

Contextualizing the quantitative results on the current status of German WSF with the narrative self-assessments of WSF staff in the concluding free-text question enhances and refines the impression conveyed by the numbers. Even from the brief statements, it is possible to derive a diverse range of statements due to the open-ended nature of the writing prompt. At the same time, behind the differentiating details, narratives emerge in which seemingly overarching attitudes materialize in the discourse of the WSF community. Against the back-

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13 Positive emotions expressed: Satisfaction (4x), pride (3x), joy (2x), good (2x), very good (1x), grateful (1x), excitement (1x); negative emotional expressions: Frustration (4x), anger (2x), worried (1x), annoyed (1x), great anger (1x), very slowed down (1x), grueling (1x), draining (1x), lonely/alone (2x). Only explicitly expressed feelings such as "I feel alone" were listed, not descriptions such as "I am alone in charge".

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ground of such narratives, the results of the analysis will be interpreted, and the yield for further WSF work will be considered.

Firstly, many contributions elucidate the relationship between institutional support and resource provision. In particular, the absence of both of these factors is described as a burden on work (see Chapter 2.5) and is linked to the subsequent need for justification of the professional and scientific contribution of the WSF to the university ("persuasion and awareness-raising work," No. 32; "letters of request [...] to decision-makers in the university administration," No. 4). In contrast, respondents state that establishment processes are effective when university stakeholders are convinced, persuade others, and promote the WSF ("thanks to the very smart planning of our department head", No. 12). The initially optimistic impression conveyed by the quantitative data regarding the consolidation process is somewhat diminished when viewed in conjunction with the detailed descriptions of the actual circumstances. While there are indeed instances where the consolidation of a WSF is accompanied by the expansion of personnel (see Chapter 2.2), elsewhere, the process involves a pragmatic reduction to the smallest work capacity ("75 % position: the stabilized remainder of a large writing center," No. 11). While the permanent status provides a certain degree of security and continuity, the reduced capacity results in limited efficacy. This case confirms Girgensohn's (2017: 284 f.) observation regarding the institutionalization of American WSF that achieved institutionalization levels must be continuously reaffirmed and safeguarded. This is supported by the quantitative result that significantly more individual positions than institutions were funded permanently. Consequently, the current consolidation status of these positions will have to be renegotiated upon their expiration. At this point, it seems sensible to collect both the negative and the positive narratives, to provide a pool of negative scenarios that experience tells us should be avoided, and successful strategies that could be proactively consulted in preparation for further negotiation or renegotiation processes.

Secondly, the institutional and structural configuration of WSF is addressed repeatedly. Most WSF are placed institutionally central within a college or university, and statements indicate a tendency for further WSF at departments to be centralized. This development is perceived as positive (see Chapter 2.1), as centralization is seen as a success or establishment criterion for WSF, possibly because of an increase in reach. Conversely, some statements deal with the problematic aspects of locating WSF within a larger, centralized institution: This was evident where a WSF was merely incorporated into another institution's program (e. g. No. 6) or when the placement of the WSF depended on internal negotiations (see, e. g. No. 57). These findings suggest that when implementing centralized placement of a WSF, one should also make sure of a strong situational context in order to preserve one's conceptual identity.

Thirdly, respondents were most positive about the range of services, where WSF have a high degree of responsibility and freedom (see Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 264 f.). Responses address the professionalization processes in WSF that have been identified by research (see Girgensohn/Peters 2012). Some statements indicate how programs are developed to meet specific needs at universities ("refugee students", No. 8) or for precarious employment situa-

tions (No. 77). Other statements show conceptual considerations like the necessity of extending established program components, such as writing consultation for students, or encompassing a broader range of services, particularly for teaching staff (see Chapter 2.5). The establishment of a system of multipliers to sustainably extend the influence of the WSF beyond its direct work with writers is also frequently mentioned. This subject area conceals a large number of narratives on didactic writing concepts that can be used as quality arguments in institutional negotiation processes. These include convictions from the writing didactic discourse, such as the effectiveness of multiplier models or writing in the disciplines, as well as ideas tailored to the needs of university contexts.

WSF staff are aware of the value of their specialized scientific perspective and expertise. This is shown by subject-specific professional assessments such as statements on AI (see Chapter 2.5), which convey of the narrative that the university environment has not yet reached the same professional level of understanding of the didactic possibilities and necessity in relation to AI use as the WSF staff.

Fourthly, WSF see themselves as egalitarian players in the university environment. This can be seen in the statements on the current status of the WSF, which primarily concern the relationship between conceptual, institutional, and scientific foundations and the potential for institutional implementation (see Chapters 2.4 and 2.5). However, it is also clear that the staff conceptually locate and set up their own WSF according to the discourse on WSF, while in various cases funding institutions finance basic practical (e. g. No. 57) or particularly cost effective (e. g. No. 53) writing support pragmatically – and not on the basis of writing research or WSF experience and discourse. In the institutional hierarchy, WSF are subordinate.

At all levels, the necessity of work to establish and institutionalize the WSF (cf. Girgensohn 2017) is explicitly emphasized, with a particular focus on funding and persuasion work. Respondents stress the importance of justifying the efficacy and effectiveness of WSF work from a professional perspective vis-à-vis higher-level funding institutions. In some cases, this culminates in an examination of the necessity of university politics or the interconnections between strategy and concept (see Chapter 2.5).

For the future design of such institutional negotiation processes, a compilation of strategically applicable arguments and narratives would be helpful. In addition, it might be insightful to work out narratives that can be gained by analyzing the practical, conceptual and institutional set-up of the current German WSF landscape and their institutionalization work.

The insights into the status of the institutionalization of German WSF that the analysis of the free-text responses provided indicate what kinds of results could be expected from a more in-depth investigation of the institutional constellations, conceptual narratives and stories of origin. The free-text statements already showed that the themes discussed by the employees overlap with the results of Girgensohn's institutionalization study for the US, e. g. with regard to financial problems or the high motivation of WSF employees (cf. Girgensohn 2017: 155, 158 f.). The extent of these analogous structures or differences should be further differentiated. The storytelling approach seems particularly suitable for capturing the spe-

cial circumstances and constellations of WSF in their institutional context. In doing so, one could work out concepts that have already been successfully implemented and thus create a pool of arguments for the further institutionalization work of WSF. This was recently demonstrated by Giaimo & Lawson (2024: 236) in their study on the "under-researched from a labor studies perspective" (Giaimo/Lawson 2024: 4) writing centers in the US, for which they want to lay a foundation for a better systematic understanding and the conceptual and administrative expansion of WSF work (Giaimo & Lawson 2024: 236). The insights presented in the present article give a foretaste of what such results could look like for the German WSF landscape and can serve as a guideline for the design of the planned narrative follow-up study.

WSF in Germany have already come a long way in terms of institutionalization and professionalization in a comparatively short period of time, but there is still a somewhat uncertain path ahead for their future development. Summarizing the results of our free-text analysis, we can say that WSF are mostly undergoing a positive development towards centralization, permanent funding, professionalization and individualization of their services. Sometimes, this development is accompanied by a reduction in financial resources. More importantly, however, is the result that this outwardly positive development comes at a cost: It is based on the continuous time-consuming work of highly committed staff, who often have to neglect other areas of content work such as conceptual development, long-time planning or research in order to achieve these successes in the area of financial, institutional and political security. Looking to the future of German writing centers, we hope that the current phase of hard-won development will one day lead to a more secure status of WSF. When taking a comparative look at their role model, American writing centers, which, after a much longer period of existence and with a significantly wider distribution, still have to invest in institutional work (Girgensohn 2017), this hope may seem a little naïve, but where would we be without it?

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