**Webinar Transcript: Fostering a Culture of Research in Your Writing Center**

**with Dr. Candis Bond, Dr. Scott Whiddon, & Dr. Carolyn Wisniewski**

**[Bri, moderator]** All right. So let's go ahead and get started with today's presentation, which is again, “Fostering a Culture of Research in Your Writing Center.” So. I'd like to first thank our presenters today, Dr. Candis Bond, Dr. Scott Widdon, and Dr. Carolyn Wisniewski. I'd also like to thank our interpreters today from Morr Interpreting, LLC. Again, if you are experiencing any kind of trouble, you don't see the interpreters during the presentation and you need to do so, you can let us know. So let's do some overall participation guidelines and reminders. First, please note that we are recording. You probably heard the lovely electronic voice announcing that we are doing several, but once again reminder. If at any time you can't see the interpreter, please drop us a message in the chat: that can be either or to the host, but Duane Theobald would be the main contact person for that. Again, reminder to please keep your mic turned off until it's time for any interactive portions, such as the Q&A at the end. But please feel free to take advantage and use the chat: you can post comments or questions in the chat at any time. And just a quick reminder about some of Zoom’s functionality. I know we all feel like we live on Zoom, but it's always nice to have a refresh. So you can find the chat button at the bottom of the screen as indicated by the purple/magenta arrow here, and the chat window should appear either to the right of your screen or as a separate window on your computer. So I am going to take a moment to switch over to our first presenter’s slides. And we are going to begin today by hearing from Dr. Candis Bond. So she is a director of the Augusta University for Writing Excellence. So Candis, please take it- take it away.

**[Candis, presenter]**

All right, thank you. You can leave it on that slide for now. Thank you so much for coming to attend our webinar. I'm really excited to be here and learn more about the topic from such great colleagues. Scott's been a mentor of mine in particular, so I'm always excited to be on panels with him and to hear what he has to say, and Carolyn as well. Um, so my name is Candis Bond. And I've been the director of the Center for Writing Excellence at Augusta University for a little bit over six years now. And this is year seven, which is just unbelievable to me. But today, I'll be sharing a bit about my why and how for building a culture of research and the writing center. And you can go to the next slide.

So to get us started, I thought I'd share a roadmap. My talk will be brief, about 10 minutes, and I'll share about my institution, since so much of your approach to fostering research in your center is dependent upon your institutional context. And I'll then explain the importance of knowing your why. So you know, what are your goals for fostering a research culture? And then I'll discuss how to build momentum by aligning your goals with your university's mission and vision before closing with more details about how we support research in our center at AU, and how we try to make that work visible to the larger university. Next slide.

So who are we? And you saw on the previous slide a couple of our consultants with our mascot, the Jaguar. Augusta University is a mid-sized, public, comprehensive research university located in Augusta, Georgia. The university used to be two universities. It used to be Augusta State University, which was largely a teaching college and then Georgia Health Sciences University, which is home to the Medical College of Georgia and the Dental College of Georgia. So that institution was an R1 institution. These institutions merged in 2015. And we are now known collectively as Augusta University. And because the medical and dental schools and many other flourishing health sciences programs exist, we are known as “Georgia’s Health Sciences University” within the public system. So I see some other Georgia folks here: we've got Joy Bracewell from Georgia College, and she's at the SLAC. So we're like the Health Sciences University. Most of our undergraduates do major in STEM or health science fields, and our university really does prioritize those programs. So the center providing excellence began as the University Writing Center at Augusta State University in the 1980s. And it was housed in the Department of English and World Languages until just last year, and when we did become our own independent unit within the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. So we do staff five full-time professionals, including me, an associate director, and then two professional consultants, and an administrative assistant. And then we usually have two to three graduate assistants each year and then 10 to 12 undergraduate peer consultants. So usually we're somewhere around 20 people total each year. Next slide.

So this webinar started with a brainstorming activity in the chat. And the first question asked you to reflect on your why. And I think understanding your personal motivations is imperative to success and supporting a research culture in your center. You will all have really different whys, and our whys will be driven by different vision, goals, and values. And understanding these can help us develop our research cultures with more transparency, strategy, and intention. So when I really reflected on what I wanted to say in this presentation, I realized that it was my identity as a first generation college student and academic that was the real driving force behind my mission to support undergraduate and graduate research. And it definitely influenced how I went about achieving this goal. So when I was a first generation undergraduate, and maybe there's some fellow first gen people out there in the crowd, but I did not see myself as a researcher. I did research for classes when it was required, but never outside of class, alongside faculty or on my own. I was really intimidated by my professors, so I rarely talked with them one on one, and I never used office hours until my last semester, which I'm really embarrassed to say that now. But I was also working multiple jobs and taking extra classes so that I could graduate early, because although I received a tuition scholarship, I didn't get room and board. So getting out as quickly as possible meant saving a substantial amount of money. So because of these realities grounded in my first gen experience, I did not engage in a lot of the activities that I now see as valuable. So I didn't do study abroad. I didn't take exploratory courses that weren't required for my major. And I rarely went to extracurricular events. Also, sadly, I didn't ever go to the writing center, which I regret now. But I definitely didn't imagine I was good enough to do research with a faculty mentor. And even if I had believed I could do it, I wouldn't have had the time or the context to make it happen. And I don't think I could have swung it financially because most internships and research positions at my undergraduate institution were unpaid. So when I began my current position as director, I didn't want students to have my experience. I really wanted to normalize undergraduate research for everyone, regardless of class status, or any other aspects of identity. So although Augusta University's first generation student population is actually pretty small, it's about 12 to 15% of undergraduates. First generation students in my center actually make up 50% or more of our staff each year. So we do have quite a few. And it's also likely that the staff will come from working class backgrounds and will be juggling many responsibilities. More than 40% of our students at AU are Pell Grant eligible, and most work multiple jobs to pay their way through school. So based on my own experiences as a first gen student and the demographics at my university, I knew it would be a challenge to build a thriving research culture. But I did know two things. The first is that it couldn't be extra. It needed to be woven into the existing job structure. And it needed to be paid so that everybody could afford to do it. Students are really busy, and they have many competing obligations. So if they're going to add research to the mix, they need it to fit and they need it to be paid. And I'll talk about those two things a little bit more as I go through the rest of the slides. Next slide, please.

So another why of fostering a research culture in my writing center was to develop our center as a site of praxis and expertise on our campus. So I'm at a health sciences university, and the currency that carries weight among scientists and health professionals is expertise. People are always calling each other “experts”: it's kind of funny. So to establish trust with faculty and students in STEM fields, and to empower our staff, I thought it was important to develop as a site of praxis, that is a site linking research and theory to practice. I really wanted our center to generate new knowledge and to be a place where all members of the university community could feel confident seeking resources and support. And although we assist writers of all abilities, I wanted our center to normalize writing support as a sign of excellence and ability. And I knew becoming respected researchers was central to achieving this goal. So that was my second kind of why behind my motive for doing this. Next slide.

So now that I've shared my why I'll move into the how. So how did we develop a culture of research in our center? The first way was becoming well-versed in our university's mission, goals, and values as well as initiatives such as its strategic plan. So over the last eight years, since AU merged, you know, the two institutions together, we have been striving toward R1 status. And our health sciences side, you know, this is extra urgent to them because they used to be R1, and they feel like the other side is pulling them down now. So increasing extramural grant funding and boosting research productivity, as well as increasing the number of doctorates we award, are top priorities. The university has also been set on nearly doubling its enrollment by the year 2030. So that's a pretty ambitious goal. These contexts have made it a lot easier for me to integrate research into our center, and to compensate undergraduates and graduate students for their work. Because, you know, we have a lot of support for research. So in this regard, I know I'm really privileged. But in all of my annual reports, and presentations to leadership, I do stress our contributions to the overall research culture at the university. And we support the research activities of our graduate students and faculty and postdocs. But I also stress our own research and the fact that in addition to being a site of learning, we are a site of knowledge generation. And you know, so at our university, all of the scientists have labs. So one analogy that has been helpful for me is saying that the writing center is like my lab. And they tend to understand that. So as you begin to develop your plans for ramping up research in your center, it can be helpful to think of your own institutional mission and how you can best sell that work that your center is doing in light of that mission or other university-wide initiatives. Next slide.

So in order to foster a research culture in the CWE, I've taken several steps over the years. First, I begin with modeling because, you know, as an undergrad, I had no idea what research looked like. So I figured my students need to see research in action in the center. During my first few years, I would work entire days in the center on my research. I would sit at one of our desktop computers, and I would analyze data, take notes on books, and everything else. And it really inspired conversation within the center about the staff's own research interests. And to see that happening within the physical space, I think helped them see their everyday work as research worthy. Because they saw me doing, you know, talking about things that they were actually doing side by side, which helped. And it also helped them just to be able to visualize what research can look like, you know, to demystify it a bit. Another thing I did was develop a research-heavy three credit training course that I cross-listed between English and World Languages and our Experiential Leadership Certificate. And I'm actually a bit torn about this, because in all honesty, I'm not thrilled about making students pay for a course that benefits from their labor. They do intern hours in the center during their training course, and they also submit research proposals that, in the end, benefit us. So I'm working with our associate director now to rethink this as a paid internship model, and I hope that we can do that. But these concerns aside, the course did offer a way for me to expose students to writing center research early on, and they read heavily in the course, and we practice reading like a writer, in addition to reading for content. Part of the course is submitting a conference proposal for the Southeastern Writing Center Association's annual conference. The students receive credit through a grade for their proposals, and I do make it clear that they're not obligated to go if they're accepted, although almost all of them have been accepted and have attended the conference in recent years, so that's been really great. But by positioning the staff as researchers from the get go, they don't have to wait until they've worked in the center for several semesters. They just do it, you know, even before they're hired on. And I find they gain authority in this way early on. So they begin their writing center career with the conception that the work entails research. Rather than viewing that research is something that only more experienced staff members do. And we do this, you know, together as a community of practice, and it really helps the staff bond as researchers. The conference proposal and presentation process is really scaffolded. So we do lots of rounds of drafting and review and much direct instruction. In one semester, I actually had Scott and some other people come in and talk about research through a grant that I applied for at my institution.

In my course, and in my professional development trainings, I also try to develop writing assignments that could lead to publication. So for example, last year, my students’ research project was based on the peer-reviewed journals, conversation shaper call for papers, and they worked on their projects throughout the whole fall semester. And then two of the eight decided to pursue publication and continued revising in spring. Both of them have now submitted and one got a revise and resubmit and is submitting her final revisions tomorrow. And the other, I think, is still out for review. But all eight students were able to use their conversation shaper topics to go to the SWCA conference to do roundtable presentations. In past versions of the course, we've done empirical research proposals instead of the conversation shapers, and these have led to award-winning honors theses, conference presentations, and publications. So perhaps most important to all of this is compensation. Consultants either receive course credit or they get paid. So during the course they obviously receive credit, but if they continue working on things after the course, they clock in for any time they spend on the research. So if they have a meeting with me to discuss the project, I tell them to clock in. If they use an hour of their shift, they should stay clocked in, and when I know they're working on a concrete goal, like preparing for a conference, I go ahead and block off hours ahead of time for them to do this work. Because doing the research is just as much a priority for us in our center as is working with writers, so we intentionally make time for it.

And I do have the next slide, which is on how to publicize this work. And I apologize for going off script to our translators, that I think I'm a little over time. So I'm going to go through this a little bit more quickly. But just a couple of things that we have done is working with our university newspaper, The Jaguar. So anytime we do research, I ask them to do a story on it. And I don't know if your universities have a newspaper, or if you're able to contact the reporters directly. But if you can, I think it's a great way to start building that narrative and build relationships with the reporters so that they can understand what you do and really sell it. You can also partner with lots of units to get funding and to increase your visibility. So we work with our Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship all the time, the Student Government Association, our college, along with some others, and they all offer opportunities to get funding. And every time our staff gets funding through them, you know, we publicize it on our site, and then that center publicizes it on that side, so our staff gets a lot of recognition. And some of them have programs where they can get course credit or pay for some of those opportunities as well. Our Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship has a Summer Scholars Program that many of my staff have done, and they get paid $15 an hour, 20 hours a week to just work on their research project, and then they do a conference at the end. So that's been a great way to get the staff compensated. Finally, I do put all of their research in reports to leadership. And we also highlight the research through a newsletter that we send out, and on our website. And as I wrap up, I can put the link to our research page in the chat. I know that Scott, um, does something similar on his website, and I actually stole this idea from him, so I can't take credit for it. But it's a great way to just be able to refer people to your site to see your research. Next slide.

Right, so to conclude, I found that fostering a culture of research in your writing center really requires integrating research into every dimension of your labor. It's there from the start with initial training, it continues through professional development. And it is supported in the day to day operations of the center. So every form of outreach and reporting we do features not only our work to support student success, but the ways research is integral to that work. So in the CWE, we are researchers, it's simply part of who we are and who we strive to be as individual employees and as a unit. So thank you very much. I'm gonna turn it over to Scott, I think.

**[Scott, presenter]**

Can everyone hear me okay?

Do this if you can. Nice. Hey, Candis, that was awesome. And you didn't steal it, it was a sample so it's fine. You know, you sampled it.

Um, before getting too far into this, I want to note how grateful I am to be part of this panel. It's really nice to be spending time with you all today, especially given our collective efforts over the past two years. And as we begin a new fall semester. I found that much of my support during the pandemic has come from people who, like me, and like y'all, love the creative possibility of collaborative learning. Slide two, please.

Forgive me if I read from a text mostly, but if left to my own devices, I'm subject to tangents. I'm from the deeper south. So reading from a text helps me stay mindful of our time. Transylvania University was founded in 1780. We're mostly a residential liberal arts college with about 1000 undergraduate students. I serve as program director for a major in Writing, Rhetoric, & Communication, and I teach regularly in the first year program. Like most educators, and especially folks at smaller schools, I wear a lot of campus hats. But what led me to Transylvania, what's honestly been the most rewarding aspect for the past 16 years, was the chance to rethink a long-standing writing center from the ground up. Small but intentional steps towards developing a culture of undergraduate writing research, including finding ways to involve such research with other campus actors, which is what Candis was talking about too, has been a big part of our program's institutional impact. And to be frank, a big part of my joy as a writer and a teacher of learning, teacher of writing. Slide three, please.

A little bit of backstory: our writing center began in the 1980s. It was in a basement room with hand-me-down furniture and lovely, faded beige carpet. Our founder was a former nun and a dedicated poet. She recognized that students needed peer-centered spaces for collaborative and creative inquiry. It's a story that's common to many writing center professionals. Someone sees possibilities. Someone finds a way to cobble together basic materials in a space. Someone goes from class-to-class professor-to-professor talking about the value of peer mentoring, often while carrying a full course load, sometimes at something less than full course pay. My predecessor had an amazing foundation in place when I arrived in 2006: strong ties with select faculty, mostly in humanities, a trend of successful student leaders as staffers, a sense of joy amongst a small but smart group. Many of the alums of this era noted via a recent survey that they saw the writing center as an anchor, as a home. I bet many alums of programs represented here today, large and small, would offer similar fondness for time well spent. But in contrast, and in a variety of ways, much of my time over the past 16 years as a writing center director has involved reconsidering our program’s positioning and daily practices. How can we make best use of our small campus environment? But how can we also engage and perhaps destabilize some long-standing, somewhat historically-entrenched, campus perceptions of peer writing support? Although my institution has a regional reputation as a writing-heavy curriculum, and although our writing center has a long history, many faculty and students alike mainly saw the writing center as a remedial space, as an editing service, another story that's common to our field over time. As I began to rethink how our writing center fit, or didn't fit, in a complex ecology of learning, I knew I had to find some different ways to talk about our work to other campus actors: faculty outside of humanities, division chairs, assessment leaders, and deans. And I began to conceptualize all of my work, training staffers, program design initiatives, and more as part of my research and how one creates and sustains meaningful student support programming. Slide four, please, next.

So I began asking my staffers: what's interesting about what we do here? What do you wish peers and faculty knew more about? I did this in informal chats: in person, in email, and Zoom, and staff meetings in which we usually spend time planning Writing Center events, or discussing shared readings. With staffers who I had in classes via our major. And to be sure, much of what was said at first involved expected tropes about conversation and service to others. All good things. That's the fuel for what we do in many ways. Slide five please.

I'm not saying that a simple question is a panacea. Nor am I implying that balancing such efforts is easy or even expected, given the range and depth of the roles that we play as writing professionals, and the need for reasonable labor and reasonable boundaries. But over time, we were able to find ways to turn such conversations into actionable items, in ways both small and large, internal and external. I wanted to build a tutoring culture and a research culture organically out of our daily practice. For example, early in my time at Transy, discussions during staffer meetings concerning students of color and writing center usage, as we're a historically white campus that’s moving toward a more diverse student population, led to a semester-long reading group focused on race and the new writing center. A small but meaningful increase in digital assignment consultations, at a campus it's still pretty print-centric in terms of student tasks, led to a lovely afternoon conversation with Dr. Nicole DeVos, a leading scholar in multimodal assignment design and support. Our work with students composing personal statements for med school applications led to a cross-campus redesign of support for upper-level science students with positive and meaningful contributions from faculty, who despite their appreciation for our program, mostly saw our spaces for humanities majors or first years. Many programs like y'all do similar work, drawing upon the informed and care-based practices of our staffers. Many of these conversations about what's interesting in our work and what do you wish others understood about it led to even further explorations and public dissemination. For example, our shared reading of Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail's argument for liberal arts core values and writing center spaces led five staffers-in-training to replicate on a small scale the alumni survey used by the original authors. Their work led to an IWCA presentation, a published article in Southern Discourse, and an on-campus presentation for faculty and administrators at a key moment when we needed future funding. These staffers, like Hughes, et al., want to showcase the ways that peer collaboration benefited both staffers and students alike, and how such roles play into postgraduate success: a story that was of interest to leaders in recruitment, retention, and public relations, and one that's a little bit different from simple connotations of help and remediation. Slide six please.

Such undergraduate-led writing center-based research continued in some degree expanded during these past two years to the COVID pandemic. Much of this work was drawn from a growing interest in course-embedded peer writing support, in which selected writing center staffers are assigned to specific courses–in our case first year seminars–to assist in brainstorming and revising at least two core class assignments. Although studies such as Regagnion & Bromley or Dvorak, et al offer strong arguments for the value of peer engagement for all writers–regardless of prior experience in academic literacies–there was still some understandable resistance in requiring writing center visits and tying the writing center explicitly to certain classes, all of which was made more complicated by the daily stress of the pandemic, the challenges of online learning for our small high touch campus. In staff meetings, our participating staffers noted over and over again that while certain students disappeared or failed to participate, most of their conversations were thoughtful and productive. In small but important ways such work was filling a gap of sorts: the human connection that they were missing from their in-person classes and in-person peer writing support and Kat Bell is in the house today, and I got to thank her for the help of that part of it, too. Slide seven, please.

Three writing center staffers–all now graduate students in their respective fields–drew upon these interests and collaborated with our IRB office to develop and analyze a survey of first year students enrolled in the sections. Among their findings, in light of their required training readings, 82% of students who worked with course-embedded staffers found their services to be quite helpful in the development and revision of FYS assignments. 79% of those students who worked with course-embedded staffers found services to be helpful in negotiating stress during a challenging time. 84% of students who worked course-embedded staffers said they'd recommend our services to friends and peers. We had over 1000 total hours of writing support for our students. We’re a small college: that's a lot for us. This project was presented in stages at IWCA, SWCA, and later featured in *Southern Discourse in the Center*. Slide eight please.

So I've noted here on this slide how the daily work and intellectual exploration of undergraduate peer tutors can turn to thoughtful public-facing peer-reviewed scholarship. I’ll also put a link in the chat after we're done to show you some other stuff, too. Some of our work draws in interview-based protocols learned in other classes, others draw upon data we collect via WC Online. Our slow but cumulative success was recognized in 2018 Martinson Award for Small Liberal Arts College Program Administration and a 2022 Southeastern Writing Center Achievement Award; both organizations noted our public commitment to informed and intentional research and how such work contributes to, yes, better help for our patrons. It's been enjoyable to share the success of these undergraduate researchers with their faculty and advisors with campus communications with potential Transylvanians. Slide nine.

All right now to be fair: in a meeting just a couple days ago, an administrator involved with our webpage redesign admitted that he had no idea of our program’s success in conference placement and publication, that again, we were quote, “Just a really great site for weaker writers, especially first years,” unquote. Shrug. Frustrating? Yeah. But that conversation led to some forward movement and other conversations about student labor, potentially increased undergraduate compensation, and coverage in campus media. To quote my predecessor, who sustained campus efforts for decades, quote, “Small ponds, bigger ripples.” Slide ten.

Now certain campus and curricular structures in play helped allow for sustained success for our program. For one, having a small credit-bearing class in writing center pedagogy required for employment, taught by me and scheduled at a time that avoids many–not all, but many–campus obligations, allowing for the regular contact needed for discussion, inquiry, drafting, etc. Many of the projects listed on our page began in this class, taught every two to three semesters. Having the budget for paid bi-weekly staff meetings for professional development as well as planning and troubleshooting. And my position as a now tenured white cis-facing male faculty member helped create some room for sustained collaboration. Some of the projects listed on our site were developed independent or guided studies, which helps students in the WRC major move toward graduation and explore their interests in a moment when we were limited in course offerings. And although our writing center employs staffers from across majors, many students in the WRC major use their service as staffers as fodder for their senior thesis project. For example, Emma Masur’s analysis of genre acquisition via course-embedded service was presented at the Pedagogicon conference and published in SDC. Other advantages included good relations with librarians, alumna officers, writing center professionals at other institutions. For example, our WC alumni project I talked about a minute ago, we were lucky to get insights from our friends at the Vanderbilt Writing Center. And this project got lots of forward movement from a simple zoom conversation with Dr. Pam Bromley at Scripps. Perhaps the strongest advantage I have was this: many staffers simply see the success of peers and want to take on such work themselves given experience, often as graduate school applications or writing samples and more. In light of Severino and Knight, these alums have become, quote “our best ambassadors” unquote for writing center experience. Slide eleven.

Now I'm not saying that our research efforts allowed our program to avoid complications. The midst of the past two years, like most of us, I fear we've had to continually justify supports and budget. Our successes and challenges alike are contextualized by the restraints of enrollment and endowment. Y’all get it: as leaders and partners in your own spaces, services such as ours can border on the evangelical, for better or worse. The effort required in sustaining a research culture on a campus with no center for teaching and learning and no centralized site for undergraduate scholarship, and as a director who teaches and holds other administrative roles, has made me be more aware of boundaries and balance. At times, I haven't been able to weave such mentoring. But it’s these duties that have not only aided staffers in deepening their own understanding of writing and writing pedagogy, which leads to better tutoring and later on stronger alums, but helps certain campus actors begin to see our program in a more broader and more nuanced manner. By recognizing the limitations of certain writing center connotations, however meaningful those connotations are, and by making use of curricular frameworks and campus resources and friendly collaborators, by starting small–and most importantly–by drawing upon the valuable insights of my staffers, we've been able to develop a growing track record that tells a slightly different story: one that connects a bit more explicitly to our campus mission statement, our liberal arts values, and to the daily work that happens in our life- in our writing center. I look forward to hearing what y'all think are the most interesting aspects of the work that you and your programs do. I bet we'll learn a lot. It's these stories that–even with limited rhetorical power at times–can potentially sustain us amongst challenges to education writ large. Thanks, y'all.

And I believe Carolyn is up next.

**[Carolyn, presenter]**

Thanks, Scott. Well, while my presentation is being loaded, let me introduce myself. So good afternoon, everyone. Like Candis and Scott, I want to start today by thanking the Online Writing Centers Association. I am honored to have been invited to join my colleagues on this panel today. My name is Carolyn Wisniewski, and I direct our writing center, locally called the Writers Workshop at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Next slide.

So in what follows, I'll provide some information about our institutional context and culture of research. I'll tell you a bit about how I began building that culture of collaborative research when I started as a new director in 2015. And I'll share the impact of those early undertakings. I'll then reflect on what I know now that I wish I knew then, so that others can learn from some of the fumbling that I've done along the way. And I'm going to focus on one particular study during my talk today, but I will make connections to our broader research culture as I go along. So next slide.

The Writers Workshop was founded in 1990 as part of the Center for Writing Studies, which is an interdisciplinary unit within our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, that serves the entire campus. And our parent unit also contains a writing across the curriculum program and a graduate concentration in writing studies. Our center conducts about 7000 to 7500 consultations annually, and we employ about 30 to 40 consultants, usually about two thirds of whom are graduate students and about one third are undergrads. And our mission statement includes the motto, which I credit to Brad Hughes at Wisconsin, that “a research university is a writing university.” So like Candis, we take that statement to heart both for the students and stakeholders we serve as well as for ourselves. So as we explain in this motto on our website, as part of our mission to contribute to the intellectual and creative activities of the university, the Writers Workshop engages substantially in writing center and writing studies research. This scholarly activity takes place in a variety of ways, including via undergraduate and graduate courses on writing centers, and writing studies that I teach, via collaborative studies conducted by our administrative team, and via empirical research projects that are led by our current and former consultants. And across our scholarship, we seek to cultivate knowledge into informing writing-centered theory and practice, both in our local context and through presenting our work in local, regional, national, and international conference venues. So I was really lucky when I stepped in to inherit a three-credit undergraduate course that was designed to scaffold students toward conducting a research study. However, at that time, we had very little involvement in research with graduate students and little undergraduate involvement beyond that course. So next slide.

So when I started this position, several factors led to my decision to undertake a collaborative research study with graduate consultants. So first, I wanted to build ethos as a new director. So in accepting this position, I moved from a faculty role at a previous institution to a staff role at my current institution. And, as we know, staff are not always accorded the same respect within research institutions as our faculty counterparts. And it was important to me to keep my quote unquote, “research chops.” So even though research was not an official part of my job description at that time, it was important to me to keep this aspect of my professional identity alive. And then second, as a new director, I had a lot of community-building to do. So I inherited my staff that first year, and I knew that I needed to do a lot of listening, but I also had to give my staff a reason to be excited about me and to trust me as a leader. And then finally, I was given an external evaluation that had been conducted the previous year, and that charged me with “bringing our writing center into the 21st century.” So when I started, students were still making phone calls to reserve appointments with us. We had a website, but no form of online tutoring. So I knew that an early task would be to implement an online scheduling system, and in doing so, begin to offer online tutoring. So with these combined factors, I decided to ask consultants to volunteer to become part of a research team, where we would start a reading group about online tutoring, design the study, collect and analyze data about students’ and tutors’ experiences in our new online services, and start a process of innovation, assessment, and publication that would be key to our mission and philosophy as a writing center. So seven students joined my research team, the majority of whom were writing studies graduate students, and I'll note that the call was open to undergrads and grads, but only grads took me up on it. We had very few undergraduate consultants at that time. So next slide.

So what you see here is just a short snapshot of our process, which lasted from spring of 2016 to about spring of 2019, and, if we're including follow up research, continues on today. So our process had a lot of steps. We started by determining our online format and tools, tested them ourselves, and prepared the infrastructure to go live with our writers. We had to design the study, which included drafting interview scripts and surveys and involved more than one modification to the IRB protocol. We spent a semester collecting data and then we spent more than one semester transcribing and analyzing that data. We took our results to IWCA twice, and we eventually published an article in the *Writing Center Journal*. So next slide.

So this collaborative research had a range of impacts for our center. The research team had opportunities for scholarly and professional development, including conference attendance and publication. And I'm very proud to say that three members of this research team are now writing center directors themselves, and I think I saw María and Evin come in, so happy to give a shout out to y'all now. Our collaborative research also fostered community and made self-study and assessment central to the identity of our center. The research also increased staff buy-in for online tutoring, so we learned about what made sessions successful and satisfactory to tutors and writers. We were able to implement practical suggestions to refine our services, and to create robust training and preparatory experiences. So online tutoring, which had been brand new, became a normal part of all of our tutors’ practice, and we were therefore prepared to pivot seamlessly to fully online tutoring in March of 2020. Our research has also raised visibility for our writing center; like Candis and Scott have mentioned, we also created a research page for our website, which I'm linking to in the chat now. We were invited to present about our collaboration to graduate students and faculty in the Center for Writing Studies. And our work and its impact on practice has been featured by our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences newsletter, and you see a screenshot of that on the slide here. And then, as well, other undergraduate and graduate students have collaborated with me to pick up where our original study left off, asking questions about online tutoring during the pandemic and then now in our current state of affairs. We developed asynchronous tutoring with a similar process and are currently analyzing tutors’ and students’ experiences across multiple modes. So, in other words, this research had legs, and it carried our center into a range of new directions. So as other folks are considering where to begin with local research, I recommend reflecting on what might open up new doors and directions for your center. So before I conclude, I want to share some reflections on what I've learned about collaborative research. So first, as you saw from a previous slide, this collaboration spanned not just months, but years. So I had been prepared for a lengthy process, but I think we were all unprepared for just how long the process took from the initial IRB protocol to the eventual publication. So if you're on a timeline, be ruthless about your research question and the amount of data you plan to collect. And I think especially if you're a new researcher and starting to work with other novice researchers, consider starting with a replication study. Such an approach can place useful constraints on a study with the defined research question, body of literature, and methods to use.

Second, I recommend writing an expansive IRB. So here, I'm thinking along two lines. First, our research team kept thinking of additional data points we wanted to collect and so we kept having to submit a modified protocol. So plan and plan and plan ahead. And then second, I recommend talking with your IRB about whether you might be able to create a more expansive protocol that could cover more than one project at your center. And this is something that I've been able to do to cover our undergraduate research, and it cuts down a lot on the yearly paperwork that I need to do. And let me jump down a little bit. So I would say if you have a research team, like a big one like ours, it would be helpful to start by defining team members' roles. So we had aimed to be fully collaborative, but found that not everybody was able to stay on the same timeline for transcription and writing and things like that. So now I tried to be more purposeful about which team members might only be involved in data collection versus analysis versus writing. And having a conversation about those roles up front can prevent confusion later on. And then finally, be really purposeful about your data management strategies. So we collected a ton of data for this study, and we did so at a time when I was still new to the university and wasn't fully aware of data storage options, or even of how detailed our data management plan needed to be. Like down to specifications for naming files. So really talk with your data management folks. And, you know, think strategically about how you're going to stay on top of that. So I'm happy to share other lessons learned during our q&a. Next slide.

But I think it is time for me to wrap up. So before I conclude, I just want to thank my co-researchers Tom, María, Lisa, Evin, Allison, Dorothy, Logan. They have been amazing to work with, and I'm so glad to have collaborated with them. I also want to take a minute to acknowledge our field, which has such a long-standing history of valuing and publishing collaborative research, and of making space institutionally and professionally to welcome newcomers to writing center research. So thanks to everybody. And I'm looking forward to the discussion that we'll have as we turn now to the q&a portion.

**[Bri, moderator]** Right, and we will go ahead and open the floor for questions. So if you do have a question for our panelists, you can either share that in the chat and someone will read it out, or you can raise your hand and we will call on you. I also wanted to point out the panelists have prepared a handout to help you start thinking on your own about integrating research into your specific Writing Center context. So I'm going to share a link to that handout in the chat now. I guess who do we have questions either again in the chat or if you would like to unmute and share

Yes, Kat.

**[Kat, participant]**Yeah. So um, I really appreciate that Candice talked about how she models research for her staffers and sits in the center and kind of goes through that process. And I'm working almost completely remotely. I was wondering, first of all, about how to model that in a dispersed format, if I don't have my staff all around us, if we aren't with each other all the time, and Jesse Priest is another one of the staff members that works with me at Antioch, but also how to build in time for that when we're being.

**[Bri, moderator]** No, I'm sorry. What? Sorry? Oh, no. Okay, sorry. I was, I experienced a technical difficulty there, go right ahead.

**[Kat, participant]** No worries. I didn't know how much, how much got through. But I was wondering about you know, how to do this in a dispersed format. And then how to set aside time when we're being pulled in a million different directions.

**[Scott, presenter]** Okay, can I take a piece of that? Like a small part? Okay, I didn't know if, I didn't know, if we were having technical difficulties or not. Okay. So one thing is I know, I mean, we're a small writing center and my colleagues presented are from larger and much larger programs. One thing I know is that I can't do a research program with undergraduates all the time. I know that sometimes things unfold or opportunities fall from the sky or an opportunity unveils itself or a question: What's interesting? and then I sit down, say, Okay, what is this going to take? and sort of layout. I think Carolyn did this really well, sort of showing: What would this timeline realistically be and being just really upfront with that, but also showing outcomes. I think a lot of that seeing what other staffers have done has been really helpful. And with the disburse thing, even though I'm at a small colleges, that’s high touch, one of the things I've done with staffers that I've worked with as undergrads, and research projects was okay, I do the same thing I do with my writer’s group. I'm in a writer group with two other directors and we live in three different cities. And we all log on to zoom for two hours a week at the beginning and an hour at the end. And we make it so that people can check in and check out and we hand off the project. So it's not ideal. It's not always what I would like to envision. But I was really surprised during the pandemic, and even at this stage in the pandemic, what we can get done when we simply say, Okay, we're gonna agree to 90 minutes, small things, scaling things to expectations. This has taught me a lot about patience.. But it's also taught me a lot about what happens once staffers see the project and see kind of the shape of it, they get really excited about it. So I think that's really cool.

**[Carolyn, presenter]** I'll jump in, but if Candis has words she wants to say, since I think this, this question started with her presentation. I'll speak first to the modeling. So one thing that I found to be very useful is collecting a central folder of resources. So at our university, we use Box, or we use Moodle as a course site. So making sure that we have central access to resources, and also maybe speaking partially to the timing question, but I, I also tried to make sure that I am thinking across my different roles as a writing center director. So if I'm doing a presentation for our Office of Undergraduate Research about writing research proposals, being sure to take that same work into my work with our undergraduate students, because they will also benefit from that information about writing research proposals. So I think we even sometimes have an ability to kind of silo the disparate, disparate aspects of our working lives and trying to look for ways to bring those together can be useful too. Candice, did you want to speak to anything here?

**[Candis, presenter]** I think you and Scott covered most of what I would have said, you know, I think you've seen like professional development time that you might already have in your schedule, if you have like monthly staff meetings or something to just research together or have a specific research task or that you can then model you know, for your staff in the moment can be helpful. I've tried like the weekly writing times, and I've even offered to pay for them and it hasn't been really successful. So I'm not sure you know, I would like for that to work where I just have times every week where they can join me in an online space and research together but so far, I haven't been able to motivate people to do that. But maybe also just like, I feel like students since the pandemic have really bought into like short online modules, or even professional staff. So maybe even just kind of using your own research as a model and maybe making like a series of modules, model modules. But that you could post somewhere and then maybe there could be just a live online q&a session or even just a chat where after they watch these modules, they could talk about research as a process. You know, like maybe just a screencast scene of you reading and taking notes on a journal article or screencasting of you working on an abstract or you know, just different things like that, that they could learn from, from you modeling.

**[Bri, moderator]** So we had a question from Laura, which I saw that folks were already kind of responding to that one in the chat. So in the interest of time, I wanted to hit an additional question that we received. And this is from Maxim, I wanted to ask if anyone could speak to the resistance against writing centered things. So they are located in a Success Center. And this research is always looked at as someone else's labor. So like it's for the English department, or like that kind of specific writing focus research belongs in some kind of other discipline. Can anyone speak to that?

**[Candis, presenter]** I can sort of speak to this. And it actually also addresses the question that just came up in the chat about, Does the research have to be around the Writing Center? So my center used to be in the English department, and there wasn't as much tension when we were but over the last year, since we've moved out, I have found there have been some kind of tense moments where maybe we want to do research on like composition studies more broadly, you know, teaching practices in the classroom, or, you know, prompt, assignment prompts and rubrics, and that kind of thing. And I have noticed that, you know, the English department has been very supportive. But I can also tell there are questions about who really owns what kind of research or if students are going to be doing it, should it be the majors in that program, and not necessarily people at the center. So I think like, inviting people to collaborate can be one way to get around this tension. So if you're doing it in the Success Center, maybe always inviting faculty from those programs, just to ask if they want to help out or participate. But maybe if they don't want to participate, because my experience has also been that people don't necessarily want to do more work, they just want to point out that they could do the work. So you might invite them as an advisor or consultant, like, would you come in and talk about this with our staff as we develop this project, and that might help them feel like they have had a chance to have their say or that they're involved without, you know, if they don't want to become a full collaborator. But we have done a lot of projects to answer the other question kind of tacked on to this that aren't necessarily about writing centers, like just in the spring, one of our psychology major undergraduates did a bunch of presentations on subjectivity versus objectivity in scientific writing. She wanted to critique that standard of being objective in scientific writing. And she actually did most of her research, you know, through Psychology Journals, and disciplinary journals that talked about writing in her field. So we still counted that as writing center research, because it related to writing into disciplines and you know, the writing, writing in general, but it wasn't necessarily about our center.

**[Carolyn, presenter]** I would just add one other thing, too, like Candis had said about inviting folks to collaborate. And so I'm not located in a Success Center, but I am located in our university library. And we kind of moved from more of what I might describe as a tenancy model where we didn't have much relationship to the library to more of a partnership model. And one of the ways that we did that was through a collaborative research project where we said, like we have a shared interest in a particular student service. So we're doing some combined drop in hours for research and writing consultations. And by collaboratively conducting survey based research, built up some relationships with the library, and we each get to learn a little bit more about each other's research paradigms. So sometimes looking for those moments of collaboration and shared inquiry can be helpful, I think, too. And I also tried to address this additional question in the chat about I don't think it necessarily has to be writing center research, but you know, asking questions about writing.

**[Bri, moderator]** Right, and I think looking at the time, we can go ahead and start to wrap up. I'd like to thank everyone for attending today's presentation. And thank you again to our presenters, Dr. Candis Bond, Dr. Scott Whiddon, and Dr. Carolyn Wisniewski. And thanks again also to our interpreters from Morr Interpreting LLC. You'll be receiving an email with a form requesting feedback on your experience of the webinar today. Please take a few minutes to respond so that we can improve virtual events programming. On November 10, at 5PM eastern standard time, we will be hosting a reading club event for the OWCA. For our November event, we will be reading and discussing Kenneth Bruffee’s, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind.’” You can learn more about that and register at the link that I'm dropping in the chat or Duane just got it. Thank you. And then finally, I wanted to announce that OWCA is accepting applications for officer positions on next year's OWCA executive board. You can learn more about those open officer positions and upcoming informational sessions that are occurring on October 14th and October 20th. And we'll drop a link to that in the chat for you to potentially learn more. So thank you again for joining us and please take care as you go off into the rest of your day.