

Sample Proposal B

Writing Center as a Crossroads for Diversity: At What Risk?

Through work with students in a variety of institutional settings, writing centers are more than ever in a position to discover the importance of risking the messiness of collaborations with diverse groups across campus. The willingness to take on such initiatives can be particularly valuable but also particularly challenging to centers wishing to contribute to the dismantling of institutional discrimination—or what Lipsitz terms the “possessive investment in whiteness.” Villaneuva’s and Denny’s calls for centers to assume such a role, recently endorsed by Davila, are easy to affirm yet difficult to carry out, in part because such projects, particularly when shaped by a largely mainstream staff, are in danger of replicating the very investment in whiteness they hope to eradicate. The presence of such a dynamic in a classroom-based tutoring project can increase the risks involved for all participants. Do the benefits of such a project outweigh the discomfort and confirmation of the dominant culture’s control that such a project may evoke for the groups involved? Can mainstream tutors achieve the agency needed to productively support non-mainstream students within the gate-keeping space of the classroom? To address these questions, our panel will draw upon theories concerning the institutional grounds of racism (Barwarshi and Pelkowski, Gilyard, Lipsitz, Weaver) and Shelby’s collective identity theory, which suggests the role that individuals outside of a specific non-mainstream community can play in “sustaining and developing” a community-centered rather than a commodified cultural identity for that group. We will apply these theories in the context of our ongoing in-class tutoring project in a section of Black American Studies (BAS) 215, a course on the experience of African Americans in a racist society with an enrollment of mainly non-mainstream students; in such a setting, an unintended replication of the possessive investment in whiteness seemed quite possible.

The first speaker, the Writing Center’s director, will discuss both her reasons for accepting funding of this project despite its challenges and her sense of the role within the project of “the possessive investment in whiteness,” a concept which both the students and tutors studied for the project’s first in-class session. The second speaker, an African American Ph.D. student who regularly attended the class as liaison between the Center and the BAS 215 class, will draw on Shelby’s collective identity theory to frame the challenges and potential the tutors brought to their collaboration with the BAS 215 students within an historically white institution. The third speaker, an undergraduate English major and experienced tutor who served as a second liaison and also regularly attended the class, will discuss the conflicts involved in her role as the “enforcer” of the institutional requirements seen as necessary for the BAS 215 students to benefit from the project. The fourth speaker, an African American graduate tutor familiar with the position of dialect speaker, will discuss her roles as insider and outsider as she helped the students negotiate between their cultural dialects and the language of academia. The fifth speaker, a white graduate tutor, will map her outsider’s perspective on the project’s drawbacks and benefits as she and the other tutors worked to “socialize” the students to academic

Comment [I&T1]: Indication of the significance of the topic; this helps draw the reader’s interest.

Comment [I&T2]: Reference to writing center scholarship: Not absolutely necessary, but helpful if it sets a context for the topic.

Comment [I&T3]: Clear indication of questions the presenters will answer

discourse and searched themselves for the agency needed to support the students and their culture. The session will conclude with a review of the project's evaluation by the BAS 215 students and a discussion of the extent to which the project shed light on the Writing Center's own possessive investment in whiteness rather than simply enforcing it. A handout including the project's assessment statistics and a bibliography of BAS 215 tutor training material will be provided.

Comment [I&T4]: Detailed description of what the presentation will contain and the presenters' relevant qualifications.

Comment [I&T5]: Clear indication of what attendees of this presentation will learn and/or gain from this presentation.

Comments:

This proposal is a little more technical and theory-based than proposals for an MWCA conference have to be—tutors, especially, do not need to provide as many references to writing center scholarship in their proposals as this one does. However, this is a good example of a proposal that includes all of the pertinent information.

To capture the reader's interest, the proposal begins with a statement describing the importance of the topic and how others who work in writing centers can relate to it. The introductory paragraph also indicates how the topic relates to the conference theme. This shows conference planners that the writer has read the call for proposals carefully and has thoughtfully considered how the theme plays out in his/her experience. It also shows proposal evaluators that presentation will fit easily into one of the conference's theme categories, increasing its chances of being accepted.

The proposal provides a strong context for how the presentation idea came about and how broadly or narrowly the presenter will cover the topic. Perhaps most importantly, this proposal contains a detailed description of what attendees will gain from the presentation.