

USING PSYCHOLOGICALLY BASED MARKETING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS
MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE WRITING CENTER

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We have all experienced writing center sessions involving misinformed students. Some students desire only a quick proofread while others supply an incomplete paper that is due within the hour. Imagine how much more productive a session could be if students entering fully understood the Cedarville University Writing Center's (CUWC) function. We could conserve precious time that would be better spent addressing the students' higher-order concern, increasing productivity. In turn, efficiency would allow the tutor to address the student's later-order concerns. Because clients often misunderstand the CUWC's purpose, the CUWC needs to actively collaborate with its clients and use techniques derived from psychological research to market through media advertisement.

Problem

Differing expectations between the CUWC and its clients result in inefficiency and frustration. Misunderstandings often lead the students to expect results the CUWC cannot deliver. When students come to the writing center expecting tutors to edit their paper, the students often walk away frustrated. This lack of understanding aggravates the stereotypes already associated with the CUWC. These stereotypes keep students from scheduling appointments at the CUWC or cause them to schedule appointments at the last moment possible. Because tutors are unable to address every area of concern in these last-minute sessions they cannot address students' higher-order concerns in the allotted session time. Instead, they must work on later-order concerns, perpetuating the misconception that grammar and formatting are the CUWC's the primary concerns. Moreover, when students procrastinate and receive improper

assistance, they cannot improve their writing's overall quality because tutors cannot address their needs adequately.

Research Method

In order to determine the student body's perception of the CUWC we administered an online survey targeting current students at Cedarville University. The survey was administered using Google Forms and was active from Thursday, April 11 to Sunday, April 14. We obtained respondents by posting the survey on social networking sites as well as emailing groups on campus that contained a wide demographic of students. The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions that asked respondents to give their opinion on a number of issues relating to the CUWC. We designed the survey questions to reveal the student perception of the CUWC's purpose, their own strengths and weaknesses in writing, and the overall quality of the assistance they received at the CUWC.

Results and Conclusions

Students who had never visited the CUWC were asked about its goal. 25% of students responded that one of the functions of the CUWC was to proofread final drafts before submission. Another 25% thought that the CUWC existed to help students who were struggling in composition classes. Finally, less than 20% of students thought that the CUWC helped with brainstorming and thesis development. These responses indicate that many students do not understand the CUWC's purpose. Instead, their responses seem to indicate that they view the CUWC as a place for proofreading and for tutoring remedial writers.

This misconception creates conflict because tutors are trained to address higher-order concerns such as the thesis development and structure, but students expect help with later-order

concerns such as grammar. 100% of students who chose “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” when asked if their experience at the CUWC was helpful responded that their primary issues of concern in a session were either grammar, proofreading, or receiving a better grade. Because students are disappointed with the results of their writing center session, they are reluctant to schedule more appointments or wait to visit the writing center until the last possible moment. If students make appointments too late in the writing process, tutors cannot help them address their higher-order concerns.

A second set of questions addressed the writers’ strengths and weaknesses while recording facts about their writing processes. These facts included the time they started their draft as well as the number of drafts they created before the final draft. 18% of students responded that using research was a weak area in their writing, while 21% listed brainstorming as a problem. Students consider themselves weaker in these two areas than with later-order concerns such as grammar (15%) and flow (17%).

When considering the point at which students began writing, our research found that 65% of students begin to work on the paper the week or the night before it is due. Moreover, 44% of students responded that they created only one rough draft before submitting their final paper, while 25% created no rough draft before writing the final product.

Since many students are struggling in areas that occur early on in the writing process, logically, they should schedule appointments at a time that allows them to focus in on their areas of weakness. However, because of time constraints, the 65% of writers beginning their papers the week or the night before it is due cannot receive assistance from CUWC for higher-order concerns because they have no time to visit the CUWC. This overlap between writer

procrastination and their self-diagnosed areas of weakness prevents writers from receiving help with the higher-order concerns that they struggle with the most. Moreover, almost 70% of writers created only one rough draft or even no rough draft at all. These numbers show that the few writers who come to the CUWC with time to work on their paper are often unwilling to revise their drafts or create another draft in response to their session. As our data indicated, 18 of the 35 students who started writing prior to the final week responded that they wrote one rough draft or simply didn't have time for a rough draft.

Our data may lead one to ask if the CUWC is actually providing a useful service to anyone. However, those who visit the CUWC with accurate expectations and are willing to revise find the assistance received at the CUWC to be invaluable. Of all the students surveyed, 85% "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that the CUWC sessions they attended were helpful. Students who visited the CUWC three or more times per semester received the most benefit. All of those who visited frequently considered the sessions helpful and 65% considered them "Extremely Helpful." These results show that writing center techniques are effective when implemented with the correct student expectations and within the correct time frame.

Solution

Since our research indicates that writers come to the CUWC for the wrong reasons and at the wrong time, we now understand the student frustration associated with CUWC appointments. Students often become discouraged with their results from CUWC sessions because they misunderstand the CUWC's purpose. To avoid this problem, the CUWC must market to its potential clients so that all students understand its purpose.

Marketing

Successful marketing begins with satisfied needs. At the CUWC, clients need to improve their skills in the long term by working to improve their drafts in the short term.¹ The CUWC exists to improve the writers' processes and can fulfill such needs. Writing centers are services and rely on the mutual benefits of service exchanges,² meaning that they satisfy their own needs by satisfying their clients' needs. Fulfilling their promises to clients, they strengthen their reputations and create long term relationships. Situations in which the client and service profit equally often determine the client's future actions and communications. Thus, the service must satisfy the client to market successfully.

According to its mission statement, the CUWC promises to "help writers at all levels of proficiency from all academic disciplines develop effective writing skills." According to Cedarville's objective statements the CUWC helps with writers needs in accordance with the hierarchy of concerns: the CUWC helps students discover their strengths and weaknesses, to understand their assignments, and to increase their confidence and initiative.³ Given its mission statement and objectives, the CUWC must help all students with their writing process at any stage so that its students can improve as writers. Our research indicates that many students leave the writing center generally satisfied; however, most do not understand how to best use the CUWC's services. While 85% of students indicated that they "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that their sessions were helpful, less than 20% of students who took the survey considered

¹Richard Leahy. "What the College Writing Center Is--and Isn't." *College Teaching* 38, no. (1990): 47. jstor.org (accessed March 12, 2013).

² William Mindak and Robert Folger. "Toward Integration of Marketing and Organizational Behavior in the Service Economy." *Journal of Business Research*, no. 20 (1990): 1.

³ Cedarville University. "Mission & Objectives." Cedarville University Mission and Objectives. <http://www.cedarville.edu/Offices/Writing-Center/Mission-and-Objectives.aspx> (accessed April 18, 2013).

brainstorming and thesis development to be services of the CUWC. Our data suggests that the majority of students misunderstand what services the CUWC offers. This disconnect indicates that while the CUWC is fulfilling some of its promises, it cannot fulfill other promises simply because its clients are not fully aware of its services.

However, in cases when the CUWC successfully fulfills its promises, it will enter into a collaborative relationship with the client. This element of collaboration is essential to both service marketing⁴ and writing center theory.⁵ While successful external marketing often takes the shape of a “customer-first” orientation, employees’ needs must be satisfied before they can care for their clients. The unsatisfied employee will unconsciously market a negative image of the CUWC. Likewise, the satisfied employee will unconsciously portray a positive image on behalf of the service. Therefore, if successful external marketing begins with internal marketing,⁶ the CUWC must first cater to its tutors before it can reach its clients.

Internal Marketing to Employees

Thus, managers must facilitate an environment where employees not only understand but also appreciate their roles within their institution.⁷ One way in which management at the CUWC can give tutors an optimal working environment is to combat the CUWC’s enigmatic status. Tutors struggle to serve students who do not understand the CUWC’s services. Because tutors often have to redirect students’ goals and expectations, they spend valuable session time

⁴ Christian Gronroos, "Relationship Approach to Marketing in Service Contexts: The Marketing and Organizational Behavior Interface." *Journal of Business Research* no. 20, 3-11 (1990): 7, sciencedirect.com (accessed March 12, 2013).

⁵ Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008. 28-29.

⁶ Gronroos, "Relationship Approach," 8.

⁷ Ibid.

reorienting students rather than helping to improve their writing process. To avoid these frustrating encounters, writing centers in all settings need to demonstrate to their clients that they can mediate between students and faculty.⁸ Unfortunately, because of unique principles undergirding writing center theory, faculty and students often seriously misunderstand tutors' roles.⁹ To help combat misunderstandings identified by our research, the CUWC needs to market its image of inclusivity and usability to both faculty and students.

External Marketing to Faculty

The CUWC must strive to fulfill faculty demands because faculty ultimately receives the pseudo-product of a CUWC consultation: the final draft. Because faculty members are clients, the CUWC must satisfy their needs so that they will be satisfied and market effectively. Faculty will seek a product especially in a utilitarian culture: practicality and usability are a client's highest priorities.¹⁰ Conflicts between Writing Center theory and faculty expectation lie at the heart of each consultation; for although writing is a process, the audience demands a product.¹¹ Rarely, if ever, does a writing center consultation produce a final draft without grammatical errors that faculty members seek. Since faculty members are informed in writing center theory, writing centers struggle to fulfill faculty demands. Therefore, the CUWC must negotiate with professors so that they understand its purpose. Only after faculty understand what the CUWC

⁸ Ron Scheer, "Taking Care of Business at the Writing Center." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 30, no. 1 (2005): 4.

⁹ Leahy, "What the College Writing Center Is," 44.

¹⁰Chingching Chang, "Cultural Masculinity/Femininity Influences on Advertising Appeals," *Journal of Advertising Research* 46, no. 3 (September 2006), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=658216c7-0c9b-4fb3-9f77-04d6c4a731e4%40sessionmgr14&vid=4&hid=19> (accessed April 15, 2013).

¹¹Scheer, "Taking Care of Business," 4.

offers can the CUWC meet its clients' *informed* needs. In educating clients, services will negotiate with them, leading to satisfaction, for as Scheer notes, "[c]ustomer satisfaction isn't just granting every wish of the customer...Satisfaction is the result of conscious negotiation."¹² This negotiation, though it may be a long process, will help produce mutual understanding between the client and the service.

Negotiating faculty satisfaction--or rather faculty understanding--can take on several forms in the CUWC. At Purdue University's Writing Lab, Muriel Harris worked to make her Writing Center a resource to instructors by creating information sheets detailing tutoring methods, topics, rules, and writing center rhetoric.¹³ Harris's attempts can serve as a model for faculty negotiation in other contexts.

CUWC's staff has worked to create long term relationships by following other writing centers' suggestions. To incorporate the CUWC into the writing process, its staff members encourage instructors to send their students to the CUWC with specific tasks in mind so that their students leave with a new "product" according to their utilitarian needs. By encouraging instructors to address the hierarchy of needs within an assignment, staff helps both faculty and students understand the writing process. Staff members also have created anthologies of completed assignments that students can follow and put on in-class demonstrations. By focusing on a positive picture of the CUWC 's services, they have helped faculty teach students to become perceptive users of the center.¹⁴ Finally, the CUWC has also invited instructors to staff meetings

¹²Scheer, "Taking Care of Business," 3.

¹³ Muriel Harris, "Making the Writing Lab an Instructor's' Resource Room." *College Composition and Communication* 28, no. 4 (1977): 376-377, jstor.org (accessed March 12, 2013).

¹⁴ Ellen Mohr, "Marketing the Best Image of the Community College Writing Center." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 31, no. 10 (2007): 3-4.

to discuss assignments and explain the CUWC 's goals.¹⁵ By using these strategies, CUWC has promised faculty a process and shown them how they will fulfil that promise. Despite the measures it has already taken, the CUWC can improve its marketing strategies through faculty. If both students and faculty will become perceptive users of the CUWC, tutors will be able to conduct efficient sessions.

Application

Based on our study's research, we believe that one way we can market *to* and *through* the faculty is to encourage them to require appointments for the express purpose of brainstorming. Because faculty often require their students to come later in the writing process--around the outlining or first draft stages--it seems that they do not understand or value the CUWC 's brainstorming services. If CUWC staff suggest that faculty members require their students to attend brainstorming sessions, then both faculty and students will better understand the CUWC's function as an outlet for ideas and will be satisfied by a concrete "product" of their brainstorming. Brainstorming consultations will specifically help students to create a strong foundation for their assignments. After strong groundwork, students will be less likely to write drafts that do not meet their assignments' goals. Moreover, tutors will be able to work with students on their higher-order concerns earlier in the writing process rather than later. By improving students' writing processes, the CUWC will help to improve their product in the long term. In turn, faculty will benefit in a utilitarian sense from their students' products if they require brainstorming sessions. Finally, working with informed clients will help tutors effectively fill their roles, ultimately satisfying the CUWC's needs.

<https://writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v31/31.10.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2013).

¹⁵ Mohr, "Marketing the Best Image," 5.

External Marketing to Students

While the CUWC must market its services to faculty, it must also actively engage the student body. One way the CUWC has reached out to the student body is through fliers and writing center literature. However, as effective as these strategies can be, “[m]arketing is more than a flier with location and schedule identified, it’s making sure everyone understands our mission.”¹⁶ Since an advertisement’s content is of the utmost importance, the CUWC must emphasize the services it can perform rather than those it does not.¹⁷ It must be intentional about not labeling students or students may perceive its services negatively. Moreover, the CUWC needs to convey not just *that* it collaborates with everyone but also that it *wants* to collaborate with everyone.

Thus, just as the CUWC must collaborate with faculty through negotiations, it must also negotiate with students. Clients should list their priorities not only in business settings¹⁸ but also in writing center consultations as writing center theory suggests.¹⁹ However, sessions might be more productive if the client understands the CUWC’s hierarchy, allowing the two parties to negotiate the sessions’ priorities more efficiently. Fliers in every collaboration station should show the client that that the CUWC ’s hierarchy focuses on the learner’s process, encourages non-direction, dialogue, and critical thinking, and applies to all students.²⁰ Students outside the CUWC need to understand this hierarchy as well.

¹⁶ Mohr, “Marketing the Best Image,” 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Francie Jeffery, "Participating in Student Projects: Confessions of a Client." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 26, no. 4 (2001): 3.

<https://writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v26/26.4.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2013).

¹⁹ Gillespie and Lerner, “*The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*,” 28-29.

²⁰ Mohr, “Marketing the Best Image,” 4.

Application

Based on our research, we do not believe that Cedarville University's students adequately understand the the writing process. Our data revealed that 65% of writers begin their papers the week or the night before it is due, and almost 70% of writers created one rough draft or no rough draft at all. However, 18% of students considered research to be their weakness. Likewise, 21% considered brainstorming to be their weakest skill. While students identify higher-order concerns as their weaknesses, they consult the CUWC during the later stages of the paper with later-order concerns in mind. Thus, the CUWC must correct these problems to be an effective resource to Cedarville University's students.

Working to reach the student body actively, the CUWC has used several strategies. As individuals at the Johnson County Community College suggest, the writing center endeavors to educate students on writing center procedure and to market writing center literature.²¹ The CUWC also reaches students directly with in-class demonstrations as other writing centers have done.²² However, while such methods may be effective, often times, they are inadequate. Like other writing centers, the CUWC is still an ambiguous force on its campus and must compete for the student's time and loyalty. Thus, the CUWC must appeal to culture, making the student *want* the CUWC and can do so by advertising to its students through media advertisements.

Psychology of Advertisements

Research in the field of Psychology will help us as we work to maximize student responses to multimedia advertisements. Emphasizing three aspects of multimedia

²¹ Mohr, "Marketing the Best Image," 3.

²² Leahy, "What the College Writing Center Is," 45.

advertising--using “utilitarian appeal,”²³ tropes, and avoiding distractions--we will endeavor to change students’ perceptions of the CUWC. By advertising effectively, we hope to meet the CUWC's internal and external marketing needs and satisfy its clients.

According to Chingching Chang’s study, advertisements in the United States are more effective when using “utilitarian appeal” rather than “image appeal.”²⁴ Chang’s study also found that although Americans respond more positively toward advertisements with a utilitarian appeal, if both utilitarian and image appeal are used, the order in which they appear can affect the consumers’ response. If both types of advertisements are used, Americans tend to respond more positively to advertisements when utilitarian appeal appears before image appeal.²⁵

Although the CUWC is a service and not a product, a utilitarian appeal is most appropriate since the CUWC is marketing the usefulness of its services. Because of the importance of using utilitarian appeal to maximize positive consumer responses, we examined a study by Chun-Tuan Chang on the best way to advertise utilitarian products. Chang explains that when marketing a utilitarian product, it is best to advertise its usability.²⁶ Although this may seem obvious, advertisers must remember to focus on their products’ usefulness. Chang also discovered that when using a product-oriented advertisement, showing self-benefit to the

²³ Chingching Chang, “Cultural Masculinity/Femininity Influences on Advertising Appeals,” *Journal of Advertising Research* 46, no. 3 (September 2006), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=658216c7-0c9b-4fb3-9f77-04d6c4a731e4%40sessionmgr14&vid=4&hid=19> (accessed April 15, 2013).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Chun-Tuan Chang. “Missing Ingredients in Cause-Related Advertising: The Right Formula of Execution Style and Cause Framing,” *International Journal of Advertising: The Quarterly Review of Marketing Communications* 31, no. 2 (2012). <http://0web.ebscohost.com.library.cedarville.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=d29a2300dce8-4313-9853-0df5f4690520%40sessionmgr10&vid=4&hid=10> (accessed April 17, 2013).

consumer is more effective than showing others-benefit.²⁷ Since we will be using utilitarian appeal to advertise the CUWC, we will focus on ways that the CUWC can benefit students on a personal, individual level. For example, a utilitarian appeal advertisement could address some misconceptions that many faculty and students have about the CUWC. Because many faculty and students do not think the CUWC emphasizes brainstorming, we will specifically focus on how brainstorming in a writing center session can help a writer experience a smoother writing process.

However, while focusing on utilitarian appeal is helpful, it alone is not enough to create an advertisement that will change students' opinions of the CUWC. In order to make an effective CUWC advertisement, we looked at the use of tropes to improve consumer responses to advertisements. A study by Toncar and Munch using college students as subjects found that advertisements using tropes may be more effective than advertisements using explicit messages. The authors explain that "tropes are figures of speech that deviate from consumers' expectations through the nonliteral use of words."²⁸ For example, a writing center advertisement may include a phrase such as "We are the caffeine for your writing process - come early to get a kick start!" rather than saying "coming to the writing center early in the process can make your writing go more smoothly." There are several reasons for consumers' improved responses to advertisements when tropes are used. First, tropes require the viewer to think more deeply than when the message is explicit because tropes can bypass some of the consumer's defensiveness.²⁹ Because

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mark Toncar and James Munch, "Consumer Responses to Tropes in Print Advertising," *Journal of Advertising* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2001), <http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.cedarville.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=42871fea-5d05-40cb-9a87-2486b5644731%40sessionmgr11&vid=4&hid=19> (accessed April 18, 2013).

²⁹ Ibid.

many students are required to come to the writing center, they may have a negative view toward CUWC advertisements. Anticipating viewer defensiveness, we will use tropes. One problem that we may encounter when using tropes is that the consumer needs to think about the trope for it to be effective. However, the trope will be less effective if the consumer starts over analyzing it.³⁰ In order to reduce unnecessary involvement in the trope, CUWC advertisements used in chapel, or other locations where they are viewed briefly, may be more effective if they use tropes than advertisements that are viewed for an extended period of time would be.

Additionally, when creating advertisements, one must avoid distracting the viewer from the message. Tavassoli and Lee found that if an advertisement includes written words, it is best not to accompany it with fast music. However, music and sound effect cues can help consumers remember the advertisement better.³¹ Because of this, if music is included in our commercial, we plan to use slower-paced background music. A second study on distractions, by Duncan and Nelson, found that in radio advertisements, humor does not seem to distract consumers significantly from the message of the advertisement. They also found that the use of humor in advertisements seems overall more effective than the use of serious ads.³² After looking over these findings, we will use humor in our commercial for the writing center.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Nader Tavassoli and Yih Hwai Lee, "The Differential Interaction of Auditory and Visual Advertising Elements with Chinese and English," *Journal of Marketing Research* 40, no. 4 (November 2003), <http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.cedarville.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=42871fea-5d05-40cb-9a87-2486b5644731%40sessionmgr11&vid=6&hid=19> (accessed April 18, 2013).

³² Calvin P. Duncan and James E. Nelson, "Effects of humor in a radio advertising experiment," *Journal of Advertising* 14, no. 2 (1985), <http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.cedarville.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=42871fea-5d05-40cb-9a87-2486b5644731%40sessionmgr11&vid=8&hid=19> (accessed April 18, 2013).

Based on writing center theory and marketing principles, we are creating a prototype commercial for the CUWC. We will base this prototype on advertising psychology to market our services. One of the main groups we want to target is freshmen early in the semester because in our survey, students who came to the writing center at least three times per semester all found its services helpful. By advertising early in a semester, students will have more time after seeing the advertisement to come in, hopefully increasing the chances that they will come multiple times. Since freshmen will be largely unfamiliar with the writing center, they will also be one of our primary target groups. In order to properly advertise to this group, we will fine-tune and present the commercial at the beginning of the coming semester.

Application

When creating our commercial, we will focus on using clear marketing to correct faculty and students' misconceptions about the writing center. We will specifically focus on advertising the writing center's willingness to help with research, brainstorming, and thesis formation, as our survey indicated that most students struggle the most in these areas but do not think the writing center helps with such issues. To combat the misunderstandings of clients, we will use humor to reveal the clients' misperceptions without disregarding the clients. We will also use tropes and humor together to explain the actual services of the writing center. Because we are targeting the commercial to a primarily American audience, we will use utilitarian appeal and focus on the specific ways that the writing center can help individual writers. Using these combined strategies, we will create a multimedia commercial with the goal of airing it during chapel in the first few weeks of the Fall 2013 semester.

Using marketing strategies and psychology principles, the CUWC can change how the

students perceive its services. By actively collaborating with its clients through internal and external marketing techniques including an advertisement tailored to the students' psychological needs, the CUWC can help both faculty and students become informed users and satisfied customers. Moreover, tutors will be able to effectively serve these enlightened clients. Finally, through these strategies, the CUWC can meet its own internal and external needs by “[looking] beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and [seeing] it as an occasion for addressing *our* primary concern, that process by which it is produced.”³³

³³ Stephen M. North. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46, no. 5 (1984): 438 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/377047> (accessed 23 April 2013).

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