

A Year in the Life of a CRW Consultant

Participants: Astrid Navarro, Gabe O’Farrill, Elly Raisch, Daynah Stockwell

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Vittoria S. Rubino

ABSTRACT

“A Year in the Life of a Writing Center Consultant,” developed from our presentation at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, focuses on the use of community engagement as a way to build bridges and break barriers between all that use and work in a writing center. The goals are to share the ways in which the Center for Reading and Writing creates its own small community and then builds bridges outward toward the larger campus community.

Community engagement begins at the individual level and when the consultants trust and respect each other, the joy they have in their work becomes more obvious to others. As the Center invites students to sit and work in our space and reaches out into the community by being present in alternative spaces, the feeling of inclusion and the work of reading and writing become synonymous with Ramapo College’s mission of inclusivity, experiential learning, and the mentorship of students.

RESEARCH

Peer Consultants address personal and professional experiences working at the Center such as the hiring process, training, the work we do (both inside and outside the Center), mentorship between staff and consultants, as well as celebrations and camaraderie.

They discuss the stigma and judgment associated with students who attend writing centers and how the work they perform actually helps students to develop agency and connection to their work by learning strategies for independent critical thinking.

1. THE WORK WE DO

Building relationships begins within the center among consultants, ELL students, professors and supervisors. Helping students with their assignments consist of goal setting and asking questions to provide a thoughtful, educative, and comfortable session. We encourage students to fill out session evaluation forms to better understand how we were able to help and what we could do to provide sessions that are unique to the students needs.

Outside the CRW, we build bridges and break down barriers by connecting with other groups and offices. Students can have sessions with consultants in locations such as the Women’s Center and STEM. We strengthen community by meeting students where students frequent most often and feel comfortable.

4. MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is a reciprocal process based on trust and rapport between mentor and mentee. Both consultants and clients alike enter the CRW with certain challenges, such as preference to work on one’s own, the belief that mentorship is a “top-down” phenomenon, the understanding that academic spaces are inaccessible, and discomfort with building bridges in a temporary environment. Healthy mentorship is the first step to overcoming these challenges.

At the CRW, mentorship can be broken into three “levels”: pro-staff to consultant, consultant to consultant, and consultant to client. While each “level” utilizes different methods of mentorship, focus is placed on accepting that mentorship is not a rigid or predictable process and aiming for collaborative rather than authoritative mentor-mentee relationships.

2. THE HIRING PROCESS

Potential hires may be recommended by Ramapo faculty or apply on their own. While many potential consultants wonder whether they are “good enough” or the “right fit” for the CRW, the hiring process helps to eliminate these doubts. The CRW hires students with a variety of majors and interests. While all consultants must pass a panel review, submit writing samples, and edit a sample paper, the most important criteria for hiring a consultant is a willingness to help and show empathy towards one’s peers.

5. CELEBRATIONS, CAMARADERIE, AND OUTREACH

At the Center, we host different celebratory events and reach out to different offices on campus, broadening the areas in which we work, all for the same purpose – to build relationships and strengthen rapport. Additionally, our outreach to other organizations and the events we host commemorate the work that individuals in each of these departments do, as well as the students who engage with them, and the bridges connecting us all. Our accomplishments have been highlighted by emails received from professors thanking consultants for the help we provide, and by students who comment feedback on their sessions. At the individual level, consultants have also been able to build bridges between the Center and students. An example and result of some of this work can be seen through the uptick of EOF (Educational Opportunity Fund) students who have visited the Center this year after multiple consultants worked as Supplemental Instructors for the EOF program this past summer. The Center’s outreach at Ramapo comes both at the individual and departmental levels, and the feats we have been able to accomplish in strengthening our relationships is certainly cause for celebration.

3. TRAINING

During our training, we discuss the concept of minimalism when we work with our students which allows them to be in control of their work and be the only ones making changes to it. We work hard to model this theory, but there are certain circumstances where direct instruction is necessary. Our training facilitates the perfect learning environment for these concepts as we work together to role play different student situations with one another to be prepared for any type of student. Not only that, but this further reinforces the relationship development aspect our Center is built on, not just between us colleagues, but also outward toward the students.

