Creative Writing Revolution: Completing an Assessment Cycle

What’s the situation?

A theme under the Regional Engagement cornerstone of YSU’s 2020 Strategic Plan is “Enriching Quality of Life Through Artistic and Cultural Engagement.” We believe that helping all YSU students is part of the Writing Center mission, and specifically helping creative writing students will enhance the community’s cadre of artists, in particular poets.

“The best way to help creative writing students would be by having highly skilled creative writing tutors in place to help.”
– Christopher Barzak,
YSU Associate Professor, Fiction Writing

What’s the intent?

Training
After analyzing our weaknesses, we trained over several monthly staff meetings:
- reviewed handouts
  - Rhythm
  - Meter
  - Poetic Forms
  - Poetic Terms
  - Poetic Tools
  - reviewed presentation from Purdue
- collectively worked with a poem identified staff members who had an affinity for poetry/creative writing.

Identifying Lead Consultants for Group Workshops
Three groups of five staff members worked with a poem with a lead consultant:
- a graduate intern pursuing a master’s degree in poetry
- a graduate student with a bachelor’s degree from the Pittsburgh Art Institute
- a professional and Technical Writing major who was The Penguin Review editor and Etruscan Press intern.

Workshops
Only half of our staff members had workshop experience since most are not creative writing or English majors. Lead consultants provided feedback to encourage best practices or note areas for improvement.

Evaluating Individual Workshops
Jason Newman evaluated each writing consultant with an original rubric. The face-to-face or online appointments, lasting approximately 45 minutes each, enabled the consultants to use their skills to discuss a poem one-on-one.

The scores show that writing consultants enhanced or reinforced their knowledge of poetry. Since five consultants needed a review of poetic forms, it is impressive that they scored so high in form (average 2.85 of 3). It is not surprising that the weakest area is sound (average 2.57 of 3) since four consultants were originally not familiar with meter or rhyme.

What’s the learning outcome?

Student Learning Outcome
Writing Center staff, predominately composed of students, will increase their preparedness to tutor clients (other students) in creative writing, specifically by enhancing their knowledge of poetic terminology and the poetry workshop.

Can other people relate?

To convince students and professors of the WC’s abilities to tutor creative writing, we will:
- continue training in other creative writing concentrations (nonfiction, fiction, and screenwriting/playwriting),
- train new tutors using these developed materials,
- promote the WC’s creative writing services.

In November 2014, the YSU Creative Writing Workshop began meeting weekly in the WC, peer reviewing their creative writing.

Throughout Summer 2014, the WC staff wrote a script for a short film, borrowed media equipment, and filmed in multiple locations—all on their own time and with their own funds. They hosted a launch party at the WC and had 344 YouTube views within a month of the release of the 28-minute short film “The WC Files.” This spoof of The X Files spreads awareness about the WC so that students might be less anxious about coming to the WC.

WC consultants presented at the 2014 and 2015 Northeast Ohio Writing Centers Association conferences on our creative writing revolution.

“...they asked us to define poetic terminology and gauged their attitude toward the poetry workshop (referring to when students “workshop” their poetry in a group).”

Writing Center employees (16) completed a questionnaire about poetry, which asked them to define poetic terminology and gauged their attitude toward the poetry workshop (referring to when students “workshop” their poetry in a group).

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