

Complicating Professional Development: A Tutor-Driven Approach to Professionalization in the Writing Center

Presenters

- Jacob Kovacs, Senior, Economics
- Cali Kopczick, Junior, English (Creative Writing) *UW Honors Program*
- Yunfei Zhao, Senior, Communication *Undergraduate Research Conference Travel Awardee*
- Jiachen (Bianca) Shi, Senior, Business Administration (Finance) *UW Honors Program*

Mentor

- Jenny Halpin, English

Session

- [Session 1C: Examining Education: New Data, Ideas, and Insights](#)
- 228 MGH
- 12:30 PM to 2:15 PM

What began as a practical question for our large, interdisciplinary organization has taken on scholarly weight given active debate in the literature regarding professionalization of peer/student writing tutors -- as studies on beneficial tutoring outcomes turn away from difficult-to-assess outcomes for writers toward outcomes for tutors. What this literature says about professionalization, however, seemed troubling in that it is predicated on the assumption that tutors will necessarily go on to be educators -- patently untrue for this interdisciplinary group of student employees. Existing concepts of professionalism are also (troublingly) opposed to our center's non-expert, collaborative approach to tutoring. Our team currently investigates two questions: (1) How might our tutors' actual professional objectives/career paths differ from those imagined for them? (2) How might tutors' sense of appropriate professional practice diverge from other visions of professionalism in the context our non-directive center? Phase I of this investigation involved interviews with 50+ active tutors using a standard form we developed; tutors described both short-term goals for tutoring practice and longer-term career goals. Phase II will involve capstone interviews asking graduating tutors to report on specific experiences of professional development (transferable skills). In interviews to-date, tutors openly identified widely-varied short-term and long-term goals. Contradicting existing scholarship, we found that even tutors uninterested in writing-instruction-related careers articulated complex connections between their tutoring work and their future careers. Further challenging commonplace assumptions, interviewees articulated tutoring goals aligned in sophisticated ways with this writing center's approach, suggesting that thoughtful tutor professionalization need not involve training in more expert, directive tutoring practice but instead can be flexibly self-directed in alignment with tutors' own professional goals. Our methods and findings have important implications for those interested in: employee motivation and deep learning; grounded planning and programming that avoid administrative assumptions; richer professional development for students across fields.