

Diversity and Inclusion in the Peer Writing Center

Christine Modey and Simone Sessolo



Faculty Communities for Inclusive Teaching, 2016

Project Overview

- Discussion group / Reading group
- Overview:
A series of meetings to focus on diversity and inclusion in the Peer Writing Center
- Methods:
Reading articles as a jumping off point for discussion

Exploring uncomfortable topics to increase awareness

Themes / Goals

Themes:

1. Racial Microaggressions in the Peer Writing Center
2. The Peer Writing Center as a Political Space
3. Possibilities and Strategies from the Peer Consultants' Perspective
4. Bridging the Gap between Faculty and Peer Consultants

Goals:

1. Find a way to talk about how writing participates in conceptions of diversity and inclusion, particularly in the peer interactions among writers and consultants
2. Position Peer Consultants as central agents in discussions of diversity and inclusion on campus
3. Develop a greater sense of community and collaboration between Sweetland Faculty and Peer Consultants

Resources / Readings

- Condon, Frankie. "Beyond the Known: Writing Center and the Work of Anti-Racism." *The Writing Center Journal* 27.2 (2007): 19-38.
- Condon, Frankie, and Bobbi Olson. "Building a House for Linguistic Diversity." *Tutoring Second Language Writers*. Boulder: UP of Colorado, 2016. 27-52.
- Diab, Rasha, et al. "Making Commitments to Racial Justice Actionable." *Across the Disciplines* 10.3 (2013): Web.
- Glick, Steven. "I Resign: The Writing Center's Mission is to Teach Writing, Not Ideology." *The Claremont Independent* 28 Feb. 2016: Web.
- Sue, Derald Wing. "What is Race Talk?" *Race Talk and The Conspiracy of Silence*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2015. 3-17.
- Sue, Derald Wing, et al., "Racial Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues on Race in the Classroom." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 15.2 (2009): 183-90.
- University of Michigan Student Profile 2014.

Participants

Sweetland Faculty

Paul Barron
Scott Beal
Gina Brandolino
Louis Cicciarelli
Christine Modey (Director of the Peer Writing Consultant Program)
Simone Sessolo
Naomi Silver (Associate Director)

Peer Consultants

Renna Ayyash
McKenzie Campbell
Sonalee Joshi
Emma Saraff
Allyson Wright

Participant Responses

"As a student, it was an amazing opportunity to be able to chat informally with fellow students and University faculty about diversity topics. The community that we created was unlike any other I was a part of as a student." McKenzie Campbell, U-M Senior

"It was rewarding to feel part of a productive conversation within Sweetland, alongside individuals with actual power to define and change rules—when diversity dialogues happen with groups of students, while it is cathartic, it always feels kind of hopeless because we ultimately have limited resources to alter institutional norms." Emma Saraff, U-M Senior

"It's so valuable when instructors and students talk, as we did, on an equal footing. Listening to students is key. It was at least as valuable as the readings themselves." Paul Barron, Lecturer

Next Steps

- As a unit, outreach to faculty and peer consultants on how to talk to students about their writing in an inclusive way
- Incorporate readings from group in our Peer Consultants' Professional Development training
- Diversify our Peer Consultant staff, deliberately recruiting candidates from under-represented backgrounds and academic fields.
- Increase awareness of invisible differences in the Peer Writing Center (e.g. learning disabilities and first-generation students)