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Marketing the Writing Center:
Shifting and Advertising Effective Rhetoric

Introduction

I can turn any conversation into a commercial for the Writing Center. I always manage to slip in the fact that I work as a Writing Associate, telling people to make appointments with me in a music class, a casual conversation at Mather, and even while ordering from Peter B's. While advertising my writing center services, even when done jokingly, I have both given information and gotten new information. For instance, several of my sophomore friends didn't know that the Writing Center was completely online this year. Some did not even have an account or a clue as to how to make one. One first-year I spoke to did a double-take when I said the Writing Center takes lab reports, too. He was also surprised when I told him to bring in a research paper that he had not started yet; he had thought that the Writing Center dealt solely with completed drafts and was unaware we offer pre-writing help. I was lucky to have a first-year seminar mentor who worked at the Writing Center and both educated the class on its body of resources and encouraged us to make appointments. I had assumed that all first-year seminar mentors or professors included the Writing Center in their curriculum, which I now know is incorrect. Realizing the limited knowledge that even very engaged students have about the Writing Center made me think: how can we better advertise the extent of services that the Trinity College Writing Center offers? I think the answer lies in a shift in marketing strategies, and even a shift

in what we put at the forefront of our rhetoric. In essence: **what should our rhetoric be, and how can we advertise that successfully?**

Areas for Improvement in the Trinity Writing Center

In addition to helping educate the student body of all the Writing Center's services, I believe that targeted marketing strategies and advertisements can solve other issues surrounding the Center, as well. Altering the rhetoric we use to represent the Writing Center even slightly would make a significant difference in how people view the Center. Reviewing the Trinity Writing Center analytical reports' statistics revealed several areas that different marketing strategies can potentially improve. **The main areas I noticed that have room for improvement are the student/client retention within the Writing Center across the four college years, and the type of material which is brought in.** Currently, 76.15% of assignments brought in are essays ("System Statistics 2019-2020"). I believe it's reasonable to attribute this statistic to the fact that students often think of the Writing Center as dealing with only assignments considered to be specifically *writing* assignments — namely essays — and not STEM papers or other projects that are seen as focused more on the information than on the writing. This could potentially be fixed with a slight altering of the Writing Center's brand, or even simple, targeted advertisements. In terms of client retention, the statistics from WCOOnline show a large drop-off of appointments made after a client's freshman year. Over the past three semesters, approximately 66% of Writing Center clients are freshman; sophomores account for 13.21% of clients, and juniors compose 9.77% of the clientele, leaving seniors to account for 9.88% of the Writing Center clients ("System Statistics 2019-2020"). These two lacking areas can be remedied

by ensuring that the Writing Center spreads accurate, inclusive rhetoric which encompasses the range of services we offer.

Rhetoric and Marketing

The rhetoric that we put out about the Writing Center — which includes the way we talk about it in conversation, the information chosen to be in the brochure, the specific wording used on the website, and even the welcome sign hanging on the front door — will affect who makes appointments and what they bring in for help. Marketing, a field dependent on effective rhetoric, is the main way that any institution defines and communicates its desired reputation. Forming the rhetoric is only the beginning -- next comes figuring out the mode in which to best communicate it to the desired audience. According to a handout created by the International Reading Association, advertising strategies can be described simplistically by “The Four Ps of Marketing”:

1. Product: Is the product accurately described?
2. Pricing: Is the product well-priced/does the ad indicate the targeted audience? Can the targeting audience afford the product?
3. Promotion: Does the ad take into account the targeted audience?
4. Placement: Where would advertising for this product be appropriate?

While these “Ps” are meant for a product that costs money, not a free service, they still can give insight into how to better market writing centers. Our “product” is Writing Center appointments -- how can we accurately describe all the services we have to offer, including pre-writing help and help with assignments other than essays. The “pricing” would refer to how convenient appointments are -- are they a good length for students? Do we offer appointments at times that fit with busy college schedules? “Promotion” of the Writing Center deals with what we use as a

means to reach our audience, and “placement” deals with where we put those chosen forms of advertisement.

Writing Center-Specific Marketing

The ways in which other writing centers apply these principles and advertise themselves can serve as examples for how the Trinity College Writing Center can tweak its marketing strategies in order to make them most effective. Currently, the Writing Center utilizes brochures, Instagram, a website, little giveaways such as pens and bookmarks, brochures specific to lab reports, and a welcome sign on the front door as means of advertising our services as well as the professed atmosphere of the Center. We also encourage teachers, especially First-Year Seminar (FYSM) professors to encourage their students to bring assignments to the Writing Center, a method which could explain why the majority of clients are freshmen. A 2018-19 study conducted by Purdue University showed that most writing centers have similar marketing techniques. The study revealed that the majority of advertising is done through writing center websites, followed by faculty referrals, and classroom presentations (“Writing Center Research Survey 2018-2019”). According to the study, social media is surprisingly one of the least-used modes of advertising. After seeing these statistics, I definitely think that our Writing Center would benefit from doing class presentations as well as communicating with faculty beyond just FYSM professors about encouraging students to use the Writing Center.

Although the Purdue University study revealed that social media is not a main mode of advertisement for most writing centers, I still think broadening our social media presence could have positive repercussions and aid in communicating the atmosphere of the Writing Center. General ways to boost our Writing Center social media presence include posting often and at regular intervals, posting for other events happening at the college, showing interest in other

clubs and institutions across campus, and showing that we are literate in all kinds of media by posting not just words, but pictures, too (“Boosting Your Writing Center’s Social Media Presence,” 2013).

Now, how do we use this information to effectively build and communicate our desired rhetoric of the Writing Center? Based on the issues derived from the Trinity College Writing Center statistical reports, I believe that we need to expand our rhetoric to include all our services -- not just essays -- and advertise such rhetoric where it is alluring to upperclassmen and sophomores, not just freshmen. Based on my research and the insights I’ve gleaned from reading about other writing centers, I have multiple suggestions on how to accomplish exactly this.

Propositions to Tweak and Advertise our Rhetoric

1. Include a Writing Center guide/FAQ center for teachers on our website

The University of Chicago Writing Center website has a FAQ section specifically for instructors about how to advertise the UChicago Writing Center in their classrooms. It includes answers to questions such as “Is there a blurb I can include in my syllabus?” and “Does the Writing Center do informational classroom visits?” as well as how professors get proof that a student visited the writing center (“Instructor FAQs”). Having a tool like this present on the Trinity Writing Center website would make it easier for faculty members to incorporate the Writing Center into their classrooms, a phenomenon which has prompted many students to utilize the center. It would also encourage faculty members to learn more about the Writing Center themselves.

2. Institute class presentations conducted by Writing Associates

Writing Associates are arguably the most knowledgeable of all that the Writing Center has to offer. Therefore, having Associates give a 5-minute Writing Center presentation at the start of their classes would inform a large portion of the student body with the exact information we would like to spread. Writing Associates can and should explain the wide breadth of our services, including pre-writing help and help with non-essay assignments such as presentations. They can even give out the Writing Center bookmarks to the class which detail how to access the website. These presentations would also give the Associates' classmates more of a personal connection to the Writing Center, spreading our desired rhetoric of community.

3. Possible shift to calling the Writing Center the "Writing and Rhetoric Center"

This would change the rhetoric of the center from seeming as if it only deals with writing-heavy assignments, to convey that we accept any assignment that deals with communicating ideas to others. Since writing centers are connected to each other on a national level by calling themselves "writing centers," I acknowledge that this might be a difficult and messy change. However, it is not unheard of. Writing centers used to be called "clinics" and "labs," but became "centers" in order to impart a new rhetoric (Waller).

4. Well-placed advertisements which highlight our lesser-known services

From my experience, eye-catching posters around campus tend to grab students' attention more than brochures or websites (which the students have to take the initiative to search up). These posters should include information on each service that the Writing Center offers, and should be placed in locations where students

working on assignments frequent. Such locations include the Raether Library, the Cave, classroom doors, the coffee shops on campus, and even dorm/miscellaneous bathrooms. (See below for some sample posters).

5. Ramp up the Instagram

This can be done specifically through posting more often and on a regular basis, as well as connecting with other clubs and institutions via the Writing Center account. I also suggest implementing weekly Instagram takeovers, which is when one Writing Associate posts about their day/takes questions via the account's Instagram story. Other clubs on campus, such as acapella groups, have done this and it has worked very well -- it engages followers, provides information, and lets students get to know the Writing Associates better.

6. Add a question to the client intake form which asks the client how they ended up at the Writing Center

This will simply give more information and insight for the future on which marketing strategies are working well and which are not. Answer options should include social media, posters, a class presentation, teacher referral, friend referral, and knows an Associate. An additional question can be added which asks the client whether they know the breadth of services the Writing Center offers (specifying lab reports, presentations, essays, and pre-writing strategy help).

Concluding Remarks

Based on the research conducted and my personal experience as both a Writing Associate and a student at Trinity, I believe that these six marketing changes will improve client retention

throughout all years of college as well as an increase in the variety of assignments brought in. These suggestions would change our rhetoric to include our wide variety of services at its forefront while perpetuating the rhetoric of the Writing Center being a welcoming, inclusive community. More importantly, these six propositions would also help the Writing Center advertise this rhetoric successfully to the targeted audience.

Sample Posters



Works Cited

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