



8-2019

**“Retention and the Writing Center”: A mixed-methods study measuring writing center students’ satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Ryan Lee entitled "'Retention and the Writing Center": A mixed-methods study measuring writing center students' satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Jeff Ringer, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Lisa King, Kirsten Benson

Accepted for the Council:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

“Retention and the Writing Center”:  
A mixed-methods study measuring writing center students’ satisfaction,  
self-efficacy, and locus of control

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ryan Thomas Lee  
August 2019

## **Abstract**

This thesis reports the findings of a mixed-methods study of first-year writing students' experiences in a writing center course that supplements the first course of a first-year composition sequence. The study seeks to articulate connections between students' experiences and known retention-promoting factors, namely satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Data sources include a survey, written reflections, and interviews. These data sources are analyzed using Pearson bivariate correlations, descriptive statistics, and constant comparison coding. Drawing from the study participants' experiences in the writing center course, implications are discussed for writing center administrators and researchers as well as retention researchers.

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## 1. Introduction

When a significant portion of the baby boomer generation was flooding en masse into the United States' post-secondary education system in the 1960's and early 70's, the top-down administrative mentality that this cohort was stepping into could best be described as sink or swim. Knowledge of student retention was still in its nascence, as administrators and faculty had codified little regarding why students leave college, why they stay, and overall what roles faculty, administration, finances, personal & religious beliefs, academic performance, social stability, mental health, self-belief, satisfaction, or any other myriad factors play in a student's enrollment decision. While events such as the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which increased access and financing opportunities for students seeking to enter higher education, did much to make retention a larger focus (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011), increased attention to retention was the result of many factors. Not least among these were the waves of student attrition that befell American colleges and universities throughout the 60's, 70's, and 80's as a result of curriculums, support services, and policies that were inadequate in the face of an overall increasing student population (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

A current, relatively standard definition of student retention—an institution's ability to maintain its enrolled students until graduation—was still far from seeing productive use in academic conversation, especially while earlier, less complex theories such as “student mortality” (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011, p. 1) were stunting retention's conceptual/theoretical growth. Likewise, in the field of writing center research, retention has slowly made its way into the conversation. However, writing center scholars rely primarily on anecdotal evidence or empirical evidence from other fields that explore tutoring, supplemental instruction, and various forms of academic assistance. This is still the case currently, and this



study seeks to bridge retention and writing centers by investigating three interrelated research questions:

1. What experiences do students who visit a writing center identify as conducive to their success?
2. How do students perceive their dispositions, experiences or habits of mind, namely self-efficacy, satisfaction, and locus of control, changing as a result of their writing center experiences?
3. What relevant connections can be made between what is known in the retention literature and what is discovered in this study, such that writing center scholarship can now articulate its space in the retention conversation?

To investigate these research questions, a mixed-methods study involving surveys, written reflections, and interviews was conducted in the fall 2018 semester at The University of Tennessee Knoxville's Writing Center. Specifically, participants were taken from a Writing Center workshop course (English 103) that supplements the regular section first semester, of first-year composition courses. Total participation for the individual data sources varied, but the highest level of participation came in the form of 206 student reflections. The following section will define the following key terms: retention, satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control.

### *1.1 Foundational Concepts*

Necessarily, there are several key concepts requisite in understanding what Poziwilko (1997) dubbed the "fortuitous nexus" between writing centers and student retention. Chief among them is, of course, retention. Throughout what has been an ever-shifting and ever-broadening history, retention has seen many definitions and models, and research into it has seen even more approaches to understanding it, apprehending it, and attempting to manipulate it. For

the purposes of this study, retention will be defined as a post-secondary institution's ability for its students to persist from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2004), with the added understanding that "retention rates are the collective result of individual decisions" (Bean & Eaton, 2001, p. 73). Those individual decisions are made as students navigate and evaluate complex persistence-affecting variables<sup>1</sup> that arise from both institutional contexts and student contexts. The institutional context includes the rigor of their curriculum, the support they offer, and the educational promises they keep. The student context includes their learning dispositions, financial circumstances, and goal commitments, among others. This definition of retention gives equal weight to the dual efforts of institutions and students. This equal weight is altogether necessary for situating and using the findings presented in this study, as the retention-promoting experiences explored here are simultaneously promoted by institutional faculty and staff and campus resources, and discovered and developed through students' individual attention, effort, and will. Too narrow a definition of retention verges on the concept's relegation to legislative nomenclature—a bureaucratic metric or debating tool that stands in for real student success—while broadening allows for student agency within the academic systems we set up for them, which we hope they will embrace confidently and successfully. Broadening the definition in the manner described also allows for more fluid application of findings presented in a variety of fields such as composition studies, writing center studies, and academic assistance.

With that understanding of retention, here, I examine three foundational retention-related concepts so that they may be tested against UTK Writing Center's students' actual attainment of

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<sup>1</sup> Persistence is a term used throughout to denote retention promotion from a student perspective. It should be understood as a term that denotes students' individual decisions to continue and progress through college. Therefore, it is used throughout to invoke a student-focused context to the retention discussion (eg. Researchers are concerned with why students choose to persist through college, but they are also concerned with what administrators can do to promote retention.) Persistence and retention are both used throughout, but persistence is used when discussing individual student agency is appropriate.

them. Note that from here, the three concepts will be referred to as experiences and dispositions interchangeably.

The first is student satisfaction. For over a decade now, the National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report has reported student satisfaction with their college experiences, likelihood to re-enroll based on that satisfaction, as well as what students prioritize in making their decision to enroll and continue enrollment at various types of post-secondary education institution across the United States. Consistently, the report notes the significant and reliable relationship between students' satisfaction with their university, i.e. the value of education received, quality of supportive resources, and reliability of campus safety (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017). Moreover, the more personal satisfactions touched on in the report are corroborated in the retention literature as significant factors in student persistence (Bean, 2005; Kuh, Gonvea & Williams, 2005; Astin, Korn, Green, 1987; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). Roberts and Stryton (2010) demonstrate that although feelings of receiving a valuable learning experience, making successful use of resources, and achieving high levels of academic performance are all direct paths to reaching personal satisfaction, which in turn are statistically telling of retention rates, the list of contributors to satisfaction is vast and difficult to pin down. This difficulty will be touched on in Chapter 4, for there are some through lines that do much to synthesize these factors. It is personal satisfaction that is measured in this study, however, and readers will see in Chapter 4 that this satisfaction can be separated into even more useful subcategories.

The second concept is the disposition of self-efficacy. This study borrows from Bandura (1997) to define self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce performances and influence events that affect their lives” (3). In essence, self-efficacy is self-belief, confidence, and self-assurance. Many studies demonstrate the link between self-efficacy

and academic performance (Multon, Brown, & Lent 1991; Davenport & Lane 2006; Putwain et al., 2013; Ferla et al., 2009). Other retention scholarship has found self-efficacy and retention to be significantly correlated (Bean & Eaton, 2002; Davenport & Lane, 2006; Drago et al., 2018), primarily because self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic performance as measured in grades and test scores (Choi, 2005; Ferla et al., 2009; Gore, 2006). This relationship between academic performance and retention will be explained further in Chapter 2, as the retention literature has long indicated that students' grades and test scores are the most significant and reliable predictors in their retention decision (Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, and doubly encouraging for this study and its readers, is that self-efficacy is indifferent to the level, station, or preparation level of the students it affects, showing benefits to at-risk, and non-traditional students as well as traditional, more prepared students (Rheinheimer & Francois, 2001). However, the production of self-efficacy may be more difficult for such at risk students (Rheinheimer & Francois, 2001). Moreover, self-efficacy's place in composition scholarship is becoming more firmly entrenched the more composition scholars see its importance in the development of willing and stable writers, especially in the first year (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). Readers will see in Chapter 5 that self-efficacy is further subcategorized into three distinctive codes that have precedent in the self-efficacy literature.

The third and final concept is locus of control, a term with origins in the fields of educational and personality psychology that can be defined as follows:

a person's beliefs about control over life's events, in which a person with internal LOC orientation attributes personal success or failure to his or her own efforts and abilities.

Alternatively, a person with external LOC believes that outcomes are related more to

extenuating circumstances beyond personal control, such as luck, fate, or God (Drago et al. 2018)

Like self-efficacy, locus of control has strong links to academic performance (Carden et al. 2004; Desle 2011) and even satisfaction (Uguak et al. 2007). Students with a strong internal or intrinsic locus of control orientation are known to procrastinate less, are more self-sufficient, and display better social and emotional adjustment (Carden et al. 2004; Desle 2011) They are even known to display higher self-worth and develop and more thoroughly use successful coping strategies (Kurtovic et al. 2018). Even more specifically to this study, Lazerson et al. (1988) used students with truancy issues as tutors for high school students with disabilities to find that, by before even the midpoint in the semester, the tutors and their students showed significant improvements in locus of control, confidence, and in truancy behavior for the tutors. Despite this improvement to locus of control, as Drago et al. (2018) note, the literature is still relatively thin in its connections between locus of control and tutoring/academic assistance. Attempts to synthesize such as those made here are in need. Likewise, without such research as Drago et al. (2018), or Gifford et al. (2006), the direct connection between locus of control and retention would be even more scarce. However, because the body of knowledge around locus of control points so strongly and reliably to retention-promoting experiences such as increased academic performance, improved self-concept as a learner, increased commitment to the university, and increased willingness to seek help among others, the relatively small amounts of research directly proving the connection between these three concepts is here being used as a reliable foothold to step from the writing center into the arena of retention.

In chapter 2, readers will get a stronger understanding of why this research is making the connections between writing center research and retention in the manner that it is. But for

readability and comprehension, readers should know that retention research relies heavily on the power of connective knowledge—relies heavily on centralizing peripheral concepts, findings, and knowledge around the larger picture that is student retention/persistence. As Tinto (2012) advises, in his most recent monograph, the name of the retention game is now synthesis—combining what we know into definable and actionable policies. Not only is the retention conversation filled in more than ever, but also our conception of interpersonal, departmental, and institutional policies, actions, and attitudes are more available for revision under what is now established knowledge. It is the impetus of this study to bring writing centers more fully into that conversation such that its role in seeing students' investments returned to them is more fully recognized and articulated.

### *1.2 Overview of Chapters*

This chapter has defined retention (or student persistence), satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control, how these concepts are related, as well as, briefly, how they might be used for writing center research to join the larger retention conversation. From here, readers will begin to understand that bridge better and will be presented data from the semester-long study mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. What follows is a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter 2 is an interdisciplinary review of retention research with a special focus on retention's history/link to first-year writing and writing centers and tutoring services more broadly. This chapter serves as a more thorough bridge between retention and writing centers and provides a picture of writing center theory and its current literature, which will contextualize the following chapters.

Chapter 3 explains my research design for exploring the connections between the retention concepts and students' writing center use, including detailed descriptions of data types

and data collection sequencing that are crucial to understanding subsequent chapters. Also, a rationale for data analysis (along with explanation of my qualitative coding scheme) is provided to explain the methods chosen to examine a large data set that offered numerous avenues of analysis.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 each are dedicated to an individual retention concept (satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control respectively) and findings related to each are presented quantitatively (with findings taken from surveys and coded written reflections), then qualitatively through paragraph-integrated analysis of interviews and the tabulation of reflection responses. This sequence of analysis was used to establish descriptive statistical findings and quantitative connections between concepts to begin so that they might be made more verbally concrete and therefore dialectically pliable by illustrative qualitative responses.

Finally, Chapter 7 closes with a summation of findings and with implications for further retention and writing center research, with special nods being given to significant data points that were not able to be discussed here but that did present consistently throughout the data set. As is standard, all relevant secondary references and appendices containing instrumentations/protocol follow.

## **2. An Interdisciplinary Review of Retention and Writing Center Research**

Increasingly, higher education is concerning itself with retention. Through legislative and financial pressure, genuine desire for helping students who want to persist, or perhaps aspirations to legitimize one's particular position or responsibilities within an institution, retention, for scholars and administrators alike, has become a compelling goal that signifies value to institutions that are always striving to attract, enable, and graduate competent students. Now more than ever, retention is a measure by which courses, programs, and even whole departments are evaluated. And as institutions continue to see a tightening of bureaucratic operations, increased financial difficulties, and an overwhelming need to be efficient in light of competition and the continued increase in enrollment numbers (for most community colleges and public universities, that is), retention will remain a standard by which the many parts of a college or university are judged.

In these still-early stages of the twenty-first century, retention has become a core, defining mission for higher education institutions as a whole, and higher education's constituent classes, programs, and scholars are called upon to better substantiate their alignment with the university's mission by quantifiably proving their benefits to student retention. Although institutions do not require retention assessment from their component parts, no longer is it possible for programs and initiatives to rely solely on anecdotal evidence to support the notion that they promote student persistence if they seek to make those claims. Too often the scholarship has not adjusted to this sea change in assessment, as measuring retention-related outcomes of a particular program, class, or initiative is difficult, and correlations made tangentially through known data and patterns regarding retention do not always encourage the search for original valid and reliable data.



Nevertheless, the assessment of a program's positive correlation with increased retention must not come to scholars and administrators pure sacrifice. The pursuit of well-conceived programs, curriculums, and policies, that promote retention also reveals areas for improvement that, when addressed, can have positive effects on things such as student performance and the social health of the particular institutional component in question. These effects may not be readily apparent when the topic of retention is at hand, but to treat the overt issues of retention, those interested in assessment must take solace in the knowledge that the many symptoms which produce retention issues (eg. academic performance, social integration, positive dispositions, etc.) are the very things which they are wishing to assess and improve themselves. This leaves institutional researchers/assessors, then, in an optimal and engaged position to assess their particular components of the university for its benefit to retention and should allow for a broader and more stable approach to retention that sees the mission of their particular domains as part of the larger mission of the university—their research as informed by and a part of the larger retention literature into which this literature review will now discuss.

### *2.1 Retention at the Institutional Level*

In his most recent monograph, Vincent Tinto (2012) notes that student retention is still of primary concern for administrators, legislators, educators, and students today. Since the 1980's, degree attainment has gone up little to match the significant improvements to increased access, with only 63% of four-year entrants earning their bachelor's degrees and only 40% of community college entrants earning their bachelor's or associate's as of 2010 (Tinto, 2012). But the trouble is not in knowing what works to improve retention; it is in the implementation of actions, policies, and programs that effect positive change in student retention.

For instance, since Tinto's (1975) publication of his longitudinal model of student integration, it has long been established in retention scholarship that academic performance as represented by grades and GPA is the most significant indicator of persistence and degree attainment (Spady, 1970; Astin, 1972; Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The next most important are a student's goal commitment or strength with which a student commits to graduating, for example, (Tinto, 1975) and the acquisition of meaningful friendships (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Otero et al., 2007; Fischer, 2007; Roberts & Stryton, 2010). Indeed, who succeeds, who leaves, and why have long been relatively filled in: students persist at higher rates when engaged academically through positive faculty and peer interactions, intellectual development, etc., as well as socially through friendships, peer mentoring/tutoring, etc. (Tinto, 1975; Hrabowski, 2005; Mayhew et al., 2016). Students who enter college coming from academically rigorous backgrounds persist at higher rates (Tinto, 1975; Mayhew et al., 2016). Perhaps consequently, selective institutions hold the highest retention rates (Tinto, 1975). Student services and support services such as remediation, supplemental instruction, and peer tutoring correlate positively with increased retention (Higgins, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh et al., 2008; Rheinheimer & McKenzie, 2011). And a student's commitments to the institution through friendship ties, family history, or various other reasons, along with commitments to academic goals such as graduation, are strong indicators of that student's likelihood to persist. And although this picture has seen its alterations in the decades since the earliest retention scholarship—females are now more likely to graduate with four-year degrees (Mayhew et al., 2016) and institutional commitments are now more complex given the variety of higher education options (Tinto, 2012)—most of what was true throughout the decades remains true today. However, as Lederman (2009) notes, the more we researched retention, the trickier it

has become, as only 60% of students graduate from four-year programs in six years according to 2017 figures from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019)., an approximate 3% decrease from Tinto's 2010 figures.

Recently, more than just articulating the contours of a large retention picture, research on retention at the institutional level has seen great changes in the approaches it takes to the very subject of persistence as well as in the solutions it provides to the known problems of retention. For example, in their literature review, Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski (2012) illustrate that the very nature of retention scholarship has changed: the earliest scholarship sought to articulate the causes of what Gekoski and Schwartz (1961) called "student mortality" (qtd. in Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012, p. 1) or student dropout, while more recent efforts have looked to identify factors that promote student success rather than focusing solely on why they fail. The discussion has moved from a scattershot conversation on student dropout to a massive synthesis of studies and models that have refined and guided institutional action. Spady's (1970) sociological model and Tinto's (1975) model of student integration represent the one of the first successful attempts to conceptualize a student's dropout decision into a comprehensive, usable model. Meaning, retention researchers made many of their biggest strides in understanding retention in its full scope (not just from the perspective of institutional policy, for example) behind this model (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Tinto's model accounted for input variables like family background and prior education, then moved to dynamic variables like academic and institutional commitment and social and academic integration which allowed him to conceptualize student dropout as a dynamic process with constantly changing variables of varying strengths. From there, the retention conversation changed around the altering American education landscape. The 1980's saw lower enrollments and thus an increased attendance to

enrollment management and university and community-wide connections to better ensure proper fit and support of each student (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski 2012). As more minority students sought higher education in the 1990's, the retention scholarship sought to address the struggles of those students to persist to graduation (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012). And the arrival of the 2000's and the 2010's has seen an increased focus on retention from all corners and departments of universities, as holistic university responsibility and effort is prized as an effective gold standard in any institution's retention efforts (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski 2012).

Currently, the field is concerned with institutional as well as more specific departmental action. Every facet of the university, from the highest-level administrators to peer tutoring directors, has turned its attention to implementable policies, programs, and goals. And the connections between (or at least the call for connections between) the various departments and their shared goal of increasing student persistence are more prevalent than ever. No longer is it ideal to implement a single action or program that does not align with the efforts of others. Tinto (2012) even takes pains to connect and centralize institutional retention action around the universal, grounding experience/element that is the classroom. Now, for Tinto (2012), as it is for Powell (2014) in her against-the-grain critique of the retention conversation titled *Retention and Resistance: Writing Instruction and Students Who Leave*, the universality and significance of the classroom experience calls for institutional action to extend outward from it. In other words, because the classroom experience is universal to all students' college experience (including even online classes), it is the central locus from which retention scholars and university administrators should operate. Thus, Tinto calls for, as would the more skeptical Powell, synergistic programs (both inside and outside the classroom) to support the four key conditions that affect

persistence—expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement—which are inextricably linked to the classroom experience. For Tinto, something like a summer bridge program that is designed to help students comprehend and contend with the expectations of the university and the classroom, support their future classroom endeavors, allow them further involvement with faculty and their peers, and be arranged such that it can be assessed, via student feedback and statistical analysis, would synergize all four key conditions. From this Tinto takes the learning community (reflected on later in Chapter 7), an example being the summer bridge program described above (with criteria that its entrants enter as a tightly defined cohort), as the zenith of retention efforts institutions can currently make.

This all leaves inquiry into retention in a state of rapid and furious assessment of every program and policy so as to measure its effectiveness at promoting student persistence while also encouraging responsibility and alignment with institutional and departmental retention missions. Thus, individual fields such as composition studies or writing center studies can take larger roles in the retention conversation and measure their practices against what is known and established in the retention literature.

## *2.2 Retention and College Writing and Writing Tutoring*

For the discussion of retention to narrow into a single field like writing, it is necessary to begin again with what is known. It is well documented that writing is one of the most crucial subjects in higher education (Tinto, 1975; Brunk-Chavez & Frederickson, 2008; Mayhew et al., 2016; Day, Gipson, & Parker, 2017). English composition is frequently one of the subjects for which students most need remediation to meet post-secondary academic expectations along with math and sometimes reading (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Glau, 2007). Some estimates of the number of entering students who need writing remediation are over two-thirds

the entering classes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Indeed, writing at a college level is one of the unavoidable criteria for success in college. Almost all higher education institutions incorporate some form of first-year writing into their curriculum, and this is significant to retention scholars for a couple reasons, the first being that the most crucial time in a college student's career is almost certainly their first year (Tinto 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Hrabowski 2005; Mayhew et al. 2016). The second is that inadequate writing skill plagues a significant proportion of entering freshman classes (Brunk-Chavez and Frederickson 2008; Webb-Sunderhaus 2010) and that students with remedial writing skills suffer far greater risks for dropping out than their better prepared classmates (Barnes & Piland 2010; Brunk-Chavez & Frederickson 2008; Webb-Sunderhaus 2010; Tinto 2012). Some estimates hold that fewer than ten percent of students who do not receive remediation despite their need for it end up completing college (Barnes & Piland 2010). For a variety of reasons, many students who participate in remedial or developmental courses do not register for upper-level courses, with a 2000 California community college report putting the figure at 26% of students who continue to college-level courses beyond their remedial courses (Barnes & Piland 2010). This to say that, although remedial courses work in many cases, college writing represents a significant challenge to retention efforts across the board. However, the subject is approached or the data analyzed, writing skills are crucial to a student's college success and are an all-too-reliable determinant in every student's persistence outcome.

Sufficient discussion is given the effectiveness of first-year writing courses on their own such that the subject of the following section should address those programs and efforts that, as Tinto would have it, are tangential but nonetheless tightly connected to the first-year writing

class itself. Those programs are peer tutoring in writing centers and in embedded classroom tutors, remediation, and learning communities.

Writing-related retention scholarship is certainly lacking in substantive, evidence-based arguments. Much of the conversation calls for retention to claim a higher place on the list of priorities of first-year writing teachers and composition directors but offers little empirical analysis of the actions and programs that affect student persistence. Much of this, as Reichert-Powell (2008) and Webb-Sunderhaus (2010) demonstrate, is because the field of composition is still learning the retention scholarship and is still slowly making it a vital part of their efforts. Assessment of writing programs for their implications for and effects on retention, is difficult. It stands to reason that the various programs, policies, and initiatives aimed at improving writing are not frequently assessed on the basis of retention. Nevertheless, what little scholarship exists is promising for the capability of writing initiatives, and, what is more, scholarship on a more general basis regarding tutoring and supplemental instruction has shown strong correlations with improved student persistence.

### *2.3 The Related Cases and Arguments*

Writing center scholarship, often informed by numerous fields of study though often substantiated by only anecdotal evidence, has little existing empirical evidence that its practices promote student persistence. Scholars like Poziwilko (1997) make the necessary claims that writing centers, through peer interactions, learning assistance, and non-classroom learning, boost student persistence, while scholars such as Griswold (2003) and Simpson (1991) argue that writing centers should align their actions with the larger retention efforts of the university. Griswold asserts that writing centers offer many of the known remedies to institutional retention issues: 1) facilitation of positive interactions with the campus environment outside of the

classroom 2) facilitation of positive interactions with campus representatives be it faculty, staff, or peer tutors 3) a strong programmatic focus on academics and 4) an interactive alternative to the traditional lecture classroom wherein students can actively participate in learning (Griswold, 2003, p. 278).

Still, the empirical evidence for the writing center's role in aiding retention is mostly missing. Sutton & Arnold (1974) as well as Sandlon (1980) found that writing centers improve grade point averages for visiting students. And Naugie (1980) found that failure rates on a state-wide composition proficiency exam at her community college decreased with the implementation of a writing center. As far as learning dispositions and retention-related factors such as self-efficacy and locus of control are concerned, there is more research. Ady (1998) and Taylor-Escoffery (1992 qtd in Casey, 2001) found that university students' attitudes toward writing, specifically decreased anxiety and increased confidence, improved as a result of writing centers. This parallels Matthews' (1994) findings at the community college level.

Studies on more general peer tutoring such as Drago, et al. (2018) demonstrate that peer tutoring has significant positive correlations with academic performance, the most reliable indicator of persistence; and Kuh et al. (2008) note that students who participate in comprehensive systems of academic engagement that include such things as orientations, first-year seminars, learning communities, and peer tutoring and mentoring saw significant improvements in academic performance, persistence, and satisfaction, a factor that Roberts & Stryton (2010) note is underrated but incredibly important for students in the question of retention. Interestingly, though, writing center scholarship is more keen to articulate the long-term benefits of *providing* peer tutoring rather than receiving it. Much is written about the benefits of being a peer tutor; Hughes et al. (2010) even recorded results from a relatively large



pool of past tutors that all strongly believe that their work as a writing tutor benefitted them beyond the writing center in their future classes and careers. So many of them noted that their work in the writing center helped them choose a meaningful career and that the skills they acquired as tutors directly translated to most future learning and professional contexts. But again, the gap in the scholarship regarding the writing center's connection to student retention still exists.

With regard to learning communities<sup>2</sup>, which can be defined as a group of students with similar goals and function as a cohort that collaborate regularly inside and outside of class, a similar trend of identification exists. As Barnes and Piland (2010) reveal, students at their community college one or two levels below college level English who were placed in paired reading and writing learning communities saw increases in retention and persistence. Learning communities were most effective in the higher developmental English courses, and significant results were also recorded for the Latino student population (Barnes & Piland 2010).

So far, the limitations of writing-related retention scholarship comes in the difficulties to quantify the successes of writing programs and initiatives. Anecdotal evidence can only take writing center scholarship so far in its attempts to connect to the retention literature. So as the known limitations of any retention study—difficulties in identifying student needs, difficulties in measuring success, and difficulties in controlling for variables especially with any longevity—become less impossible to overcome, scholars can begin to take ever more careful looks at the programs and practices put in place and take less for granted in their relations to retention. So taking into account Simpson's (1991), Poziwilko's (1997), and Griswold's (2003) call for

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<sup>2</sup> Learning communities that will be touched upon briefly in chapters 6 and 7, as potential areas of future writing center research.

writing centers to make retention a key focus, the following chapters present the methods and results of a study that aims to further connect writing centers and student retention.

### 3. Methods

The design of this study was intended to articulate first-year writers' experiences in the writing center, such that they may be connected to known retention-promoting or inhibiting experiences. The primary goal was to identify, through both qualitative and quantitative means, the experiences that students perceived as conducive to their success as first-year writers and in their academic careers more broadly. These experiences are brought about through writing center consultations, time spent working/studying in the writing center, or through assignments completed as a part of the abiding English 103 curriculum.

To achieve this goal, data were collected from three IRB approved sources: a survey distributed throughout the Fall 2018 semester, written reflections completed throughout the Fall 2018 semester, and five in-depth interviews conducted at the end of the same semester. Survey responses, reflections, and interview transcripts were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. What experiences do students who visit a writing center identify as conducive to their success?
2. How do students perceive their dispositions, experiences or habits of mind such as self-efficacy, satisfaction, and locus of control changing as a result of their writing center experiences?
3. What relevant connections can be made between what is known in the retention literature and what is discovered in this study, such that writing center scholarship can now articulate its place in the retention conversation?

As discussed in Chapter 1, the definition of retention used here accounts for both institutional action and individual student persistence. Retention is here defined as a post-secondary

institution's ability for its students to persist from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2004), with the added understanding that "retention rates are the collective result of individual decisions" (Bean & Eaton, 2002). This definition allows for the exploration of research questions 1 and 2 because they are only answerable through student response. An exploration of retention that uses retention rates as its only metric cannot answer personal persistence questions such as questions 1 and 2, which seminal scholars in the field (Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005; Bean, 2005; Habley et al., 2012) hold to be crucial to the process of understanding why our students fail or succeed, drop out or graduate.

### *3.1 Research Setting and Context*

This research was conducted at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, a large, public, 4-year institution in the southeastern United States. Specifically, all research activities were focused on and completed at UTK's Writing Center, a large, walk-in tutoring service staffed mostly with graduate teaching assistants/associates<sup>3</sup> within the English department (both MA and PhD level) and growing population of undergraduate peer tutors from various majors.<sup>4</sup> The Writing Center holds consultations for a mostly undergraduate and first-year writing population, and these consultations are led by a staff that undergoes weekly training along with beginning and end-of-semester workshops on UTK's FYC curriculum (which is further supplemented by workshops and classes throughout the semester for the graduate students). UTK's FYC curriculum is primarily transfer-based, meaning that teachers aim to contextualize and foster metacognition such that students can know what they know, become aware of themselves as

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<sup>3</sup> Graduate teaching assistants are UTK graduate students who bear no teaching load, typically because they are in the first year of their programs and are training to teach and become graduate teaching associates. UTK graduate teaching assistants in the English department undergo training via part-time work in the Writing Center and in ENGL 101 & 102 classrooms during the fall and spring semesters respectively. Graduate teaching associates bear teaching loads but can work in the Writing Center and receive a course release for this work.

<sup>4</sup> Undergraduate peer tutors at UTK's Writing Center are elected by English instructors/professors within UTK's English department and receive tutor training and evaluation just as the graduate teaching assistants.

writers, and develop skills and experience that will allow them to complete their future writing tasks. Essentially, UTK's FYC curriculum, through analyzing and writing in various genres, understanding foundational rhetorical concepts, and implementing a variety of research skills, aims to improve students' abilities to use prior knowledge to complete new writing tasks.

The exact context of this study, however, is the Writing Center's English 103 Writing Workshop, a voluntary supplement to students' first-year composition (FYC) course that has them meet regularly with tutors, set aside weekly time to work in the Writing Center, and complete reflections at key points in the semester. English 103<sup>5</sup> and FYC are enrolled in simultaneously; though many 103 students enroll a few weeks into the semester, often at the behest of their professor or because of various personal motivations. English 103 is a Satisfactory/No Credit course that does not affect students' GPA but does give one elective credit. The specific requirements for students to receive credit for 103 include the following: four tutor meetings to be held by deadlines loosely coinciding with the deadlines of their major essays in the FYC course, three short reflections (completed after their first essay, at the middle, and at the end of the semester), and at least one hour of logged writing center time per week in which students work on their FYC assignments or meet with a tutor if they choose.

This setting offered many aids in the investigation of the study's research questions. Namely, it provided a ready-made data source (the three reflections), as the data source was already a 103 requirement; it made for a clear and easily definable population of FYC students since only FYC students can take 103; and, third, the structured nature of the setting made for

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<sup>5</sup> ENGL 104 is the supplement to second semester composition courses that was not targeted for this study, primarily because few students take 102 in the fall but also because a more specific population of first semester FYC courses would make for more wieldy and telling data.

easier distribution of surveys and interview requests because English 103 is a credit-bearing course uses Canvas, UTK's learning management system.

### *3.2 Research Population and Participant Selection*

English 103 is populated primarily with first-year students, with few Composition I repeaters and no non-FYC students who never enrolled in Composition I in their freshman year. The bulk of UTK's FYC students are "traditional freshmen" (Tinto, 1975), 17-to-19-year-old students who graduated from high school in the spring before their fall college enrollment, moved from home for the first time, encountered college-level writing for the first time with varying levels of uncertainty, and just began to gain the smallest footholds in an environment that poses many new challenges to their academic preconceptions, their social skills, and their notions of themselves as learners, young adults, friends, and budding professionals. This population and freshman more generally is therefore a significant target to understand for retention and composition scholars because, as both demonstrate, freshmen are particularly vulnerable to dropout, reticent in its acceptance of academic assistance, and often distinguished by its lacking writing skills necessary to progress through the academy (Tinto, 1975; Brunk-Chavez and Frederickson, 2008).

Student participants were recruited initially through email near beginning of the fall 2018 semester, and this initial email included all currently enrolled 103 students (approx. 405 students). Because the study draws from three different data sources, though, participation and consent was sought for the study's various parts on a rolling basis, with the initial email seeking students' completion of only the survey. The survey was completed by students throughout the semester because I was able to advertise the study in person and because some students sought participation later in the semester after hearing about the interview or when asked for consent on

the reflections. Interview participants and consent to use reflections were both acquired at the end of the fall 2018 semester about two weeks before the semester's end.

Only those who completed the survey and reflections were sought for participation in the end-of-semester interview. Total study participation was as follows: 26 survey responses (after removal of eight blank responses), five interviews, 201 beginning-of-semester reflections (after approximately 204 were removed because of negative consent), 173 mid-semester reflections, and 179 end-of-semester reflections.

### *3.2.1 Survey and Interview Participants*

All survey and interview participants were ENGL 101 & 103 students. The primary intent of this study was to connect students' writing center experiences with known retention-promoting or retention-inhibiting experiences. For an initial writing center foray into retention inquiry, collecting demographic data represented an advanced step that stood outside the express interests of this research. The baseline connections between what experiences students have in the writing center and what is known to promote or inhibit retention was a necessary and large task itself. Therefore, despite the possible results of analyzing our students' responses with the added understanding of their demographics, the only demographic quality relevant to this study was the students' enrollment classification as first-year students. Based on past in-house demographic data of our students, it is assumed that the majority of the ENGL 103 fall 2018 cohort were first-year students enrolled in ENGL 101 & 103 for the first time.

Interview participants were, however, asked about their enrollment classification and history with FYC at UTK. Of the five interview participants, all were spring 2018 high school graduates and all were enrolled in English 101 for the first time. What follows is a list of the students' pseudonyms, either chosen or assigned:

- Allison
- Katy
- Hayley
- Jade
- Emma

### *3.3 Survey, Reflection, and Interview Methodology*

The goal of the survey was to acquire quantitative feedback about the frequency, intensity, and interrelatedness of key retention-promoting experiences. As shown in Appendix A, the survey questions were devised with several key a priori experiences/dispositions in mind, all of which were ascertained in reading the retention, composition, and writing center literature in search of a confluence of concepts. The few concepts that I decided were significant, discernible, and frequently occurring were satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control. In the survey these satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control were measured without control variables (Appendix A Questions 1-10) in order to gauge students' general perceptions of them. And they were also measured with the causal control variable of "because of my Writing Center visits" (see Appendix A Q12) because the survey was not administered longitudinally in a way that would allow the measurement of students' satisfaction, locus of control orientation, or self-efficacy changing across time because of their Writing Center visits. This would allow for claims to be made about students' satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control orientations and for those claims to be causally linked and contextualized by students' belief that their Writing Center visits play a role in creating or fostering those experiences.

The goal of the reflections was to acquire large quantities of brief written feedback about the three key experiences of satisfaction, locus of control, and self-efficacy. The reflections are



the only data source that is an existing element of students' ENGL 103 curriculum, making them the largest and most reliable source of data for this study. Students must complete three brief reflections, with deadlines falling after required tutor meetings and around the time of major ENGL 101 paper submissions (October 12, November 11, and December 4 for the three reflections respectively). Of the three experiences, only students' satisfaction and preparedness<sup>6</sup> were inquired about directly in the reflections (Question 1 in each of the three reflections; see Appendix C). Most of the reflection questions asked about what students were struggling with, how they were overcoming those struggles, and what they had learned about themselves as writers and students during the fall 2018 semester. To that end, the questions aimed to make direct the habits of mind they should be considering as they encounter college-level writing and workloads (e.g. time management, embrace of academic assistance, metacognitive awareness of study habits, etc.) and did so such that responses might be short, 1-3 sentence reflective observations. The large response rate would result in a large amount of representative, semester-long longitudinal qualitative data in the form of brief and direct responses. These responses were intended not only to provide thorough qualitative feedback across the very crucial first semester but to also provide quantitative feedback in the form of frequency analysis. The reflections' semester-long longitudinal application would allow for data that tracks how prevalently our students cite feeling satisfied and prepared in their writing, making for another angle through which we might understand how students are experiencing satisfaction and self-efficacy.

The purpose of the interviews was to allow for more thorough testimony of students' felt experiences with satisfaction, locus of control, and self-efficacy. The interview questions were written to directly broach these a priori concepts with the students but also to allow for emergent

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<sup>6</sup> Preparedness is coded in Chapter 5 as an element of self-efficacy.

responses within the interview, whether they be about these concepts or other experiences students felt were significant. In this way, the interviews were conceived of as a complement to survey and reflection inquiry. The interviews were intended to allow for students to make more thorough testimony and to dialogue about their personal semester-long struggles, achievements, and uses of the Writing Center. This was thought necessary because students' responses to the reflections are encouraged to be brief.

### *3.4 Data Collection*

Although each of the three data sources (reflections, surveys, and interviews) were employed to answer the research questions equally, the collection methods for each was distinct. Data collection began with invitation to take the Qualtrics survey, beginning October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, and the 26 survey responses were recorded from October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. As mentioned previously, completion of the three reflections was required at three key points in the semester (October 12, November 11, and December 4), but consent to use the reflections for this research was sought only upon students' submission of the third reflection. Student reflection data was then collated into *Excel* and filtered based on consent, amounting to 553 total reflection responses, which in turn is 1,659 answers to all individual reflection questions. Because some students drop 103 or fail to continue progress in the course, the first reflection saw the highest response rate. Consent was received for 201 of the first reflections, 173 of the second, and 179 of the third. At a confidence level of 95%, all three figures account for a representative sample (at least 78) of the approximately 405 ENGL 103 students. ENGL 103 students who had completed both the survey and the three reflections were offered participation in an interview, with participation being offered beginning November 28<sup>th</sup> and continuing to the final reflection

deadline of December 4<sup>th</sup>. Interviews were conducted and audio recorded from December 5<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup>.

### *3.5 Data Analysis*

Data analysis began after December 14<sup>th</sup>, after grades were entered for the fall 2018 semester and 103 students had received either a “Satisfactory” or “No Credit” grade. Analysis for the interviews, reflections, and surveys followed a recursive process until the final write up (Polio & Friedman, 2017).

Survey responses for Q12.1 – Q12.4 (see Appendix A) were analyzed for bivariate correlations to show linear relationships between individual experiences/dispositions, and survey responses for Q1 – 10 were analyzed through descriptive statistics to answer research questions one and two. Survey questions were coded for the relevant experiences/dispositions accordingly: Q1 was coded for self-efficacy, Q2 for self-efficacy, Q3 – Q10 for locus of control, Q12.1 for satisfaction, Q12.2 for self-efficacy<sup>7</sup>, Q12.3 for locus of control, and Q12.4 for self-efficacy.

Frequency coding analysis was conducted for satisfaction and preparedness (results of which are found in Figure 1 and Table 6 respectively), and a coding scheme for all three of the key experiences/dispositions was refined to include only responses that made direct mention of the Writing Center, ENGL 103, or tutoring help in some fashion. This Writing Center-restricted coding scheme, applied to both the reflections and the interviews, was used to ensure that any qualitative data used was directly and explicitly connected to Writing Center experiences. It could be assumed that the reflection and interview responses implicate the students’ Writing Center experiences (the reflections are, in fact, part of their 103 curriculum) when a student mentions that they feel, for instance, more confident in their writing. However, there is enough

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<sup>7</sup> Skill is coded as an element of self-efficacy in chapter 5.

data that make direct mention of the Writing Center, ENGL 103, or tutoring help to avoid such an assumption. There is enough so that the data presented and analyzed here are representative, not exhaustive, of data coded for direct mention of the Writing Center, ENGL 103, or tutoring help.

Frequency coding served two purposes: first, it lessened any biased representation or interpretation of the qualitative data trajectory because all responses to reflection question 1 in each of the three reflections (Appendix C) and all responses to question 2 in the first two reflections were coded and accounted for to achieve a total picture of student satisfaction and preparedness across the semester; second, it allowed for further quantitative data that, as alluded to in Chapter 1, is lacking and difficult to come by especially in the field of writing center research related to retention. The coding scheme used to conduct the frequency analysis is relatively basic. Since the nature of Q1 in each reflection required a direct response regarding students' satisfaction, all responses could be coded under three types: satisfied, unsatisfied, and neither (which indicated neutral satisfaction or unsureness from the student, as all unclear responses or responses that did not answer the prompt were removed from the data). The same applies to the preparedness—with the coding scheme being prepared, unprepared, and neither. For sample coded responses, the qualitative coded reflection tables that follow the frequency analyses in Chapters 4 & 5 offer a generally representative picture of what was coded as satisfied, unsatisfied, or neither or prepared, unprepared, or neither.

The refined coding scheme also served two purposes: first, it allowed for more constrained parameters through which I represent the relatively large amounts of qualitative data; and second, it ensured that ambiguous responses or responses that could be otherwise

misappropriated to answer my writing center-related research questions were not included as study results.

Interview responses were analyzed using the same coding scheme (Table 1) as the reflections but are written as non-tabulated quotes to allow for more thorough commentary/explanation in the results chapters. Interviewee attribution is given as their quotes are used, and an indication of the question that prompted their response is marked before each quote as well.

Chapter 7 sees the findings presented in chapters 4, 5, & 6 examined for their possible answers to research questions 1 & 2:

1. What experiences do UTK FYC writing center visitors identify as conducive to their success?
2. How do students perceive their dispositions, experiences or habits of mind, namely self-efficacy, satisfaction, and locus of control changing as a result of their writing center experiences?

And in order to answer the third research question<sup>8</sup>, Chapter 7 reconnects results from this study to the retention, composition, and writing center literature reviewed in Chapter 2, with special attention being paid to weighing the scope of the project against what appears necessary to make any retention claims.

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<sup>8</sup> What relevant connections can be made between what is known in the retention literature and what is discovered in this study, such that writing center scholarship can now articulate its space in the body of knowledge of retention scholarship—in the retention equation that is the individual student?

*Table 1: Interview and Reflection Coding Scheme*

Categories	Coding
<p><b>1.</b> What are students satisfied/dissatisfied about themselves because of work/help in the Writing Center?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing/academic performance: satisfaction with one's grades, writing quality, professorial feedback, or ability to complete tasks</li> <li>• Self as learner: satisfaction with one's soft learning skills such as time management, effort, study skills, etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> What aspects of students' self-efficacy are developed in the Writing Center?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparedness: students' self-conception as ready and able to complete a task</li> <li>• Skill: students' belief that they possess the skills necessary to complete a task</li> <li>• Confidence: students' belief and self-assurance that through will or skill they can complete a task</li> </ul>

Table 1 Continued

Categories	Coding
<p><b>3.</b> In what ways are students' locus of control changed because of work/help in the Writing Center?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-identification: student's capacity to identify problems or shortcomings in both their writing and their selves as learners</li> <li>• Willingness/ability to seek help: students' inclination to see academic assistance as an influence on their own learning and their skill at seeking such assistance</li> <li>• Belief in performance being predicated on mutable variables: students' perception of changeable variables (time spent studying, effort, writing process, etc.) being the deciding factor in their success</li> </ul>

## 4. Satisfaction

The satisfaction examined and referred to throughout is students' personal satisfaction with both their writing and they themselves as writers. Students with high satisfaction with themselves and their education are more likely to persist than unsatisfied students (Kuh et al, 2005; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). And students satisfied specifically with their academic performance are more likely to persist as well (Roberts & Stryton, 2010). Thus, the two satisfaction codes in the following subchapter represent two personal satisfactions that are crucial to students' retention decision. What follows is a the mixed-method analysis of the above-mentioned data sources for students' satisfaction with themselves and with their writing.

### 4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Satisfaction

Although the goals of this project are to highlight individual experiences, dispositions, or habits of mind that are being developed or influenced in the UTK Writing Center, the data reveal that no other experience demonstrates the interconnectedness of these retention factors quite so vividly as satisfaction. When analyzing for Pearson bivariate correlations, students' satisfaction with their writing because of their Writing Center visits (Survey Question 12.1) held a statistically significant positive linear relationship<sup>9</sup> to feelings of increased skill (Q12.2), control (Q12.3), and preparedness (Q12.4) because of their writing center visits with p-values of  $P = .006$ ,  $P < .001$ , and  $P < .001$  respectively. These relationships were significant at a 99% confidence level. Moreover, the strength of these associations with satisfaction ranged from high to moderate, with  $r$ -values of  $r = .526$  for feelings of increased skill because of their Writing Center visits (Q12.2),  $r = .730$  for increased control over their writing performance (Q12.3), and  $r = .643$  for increased preparedness (Q12.4). Despite this being a non-representative sample size

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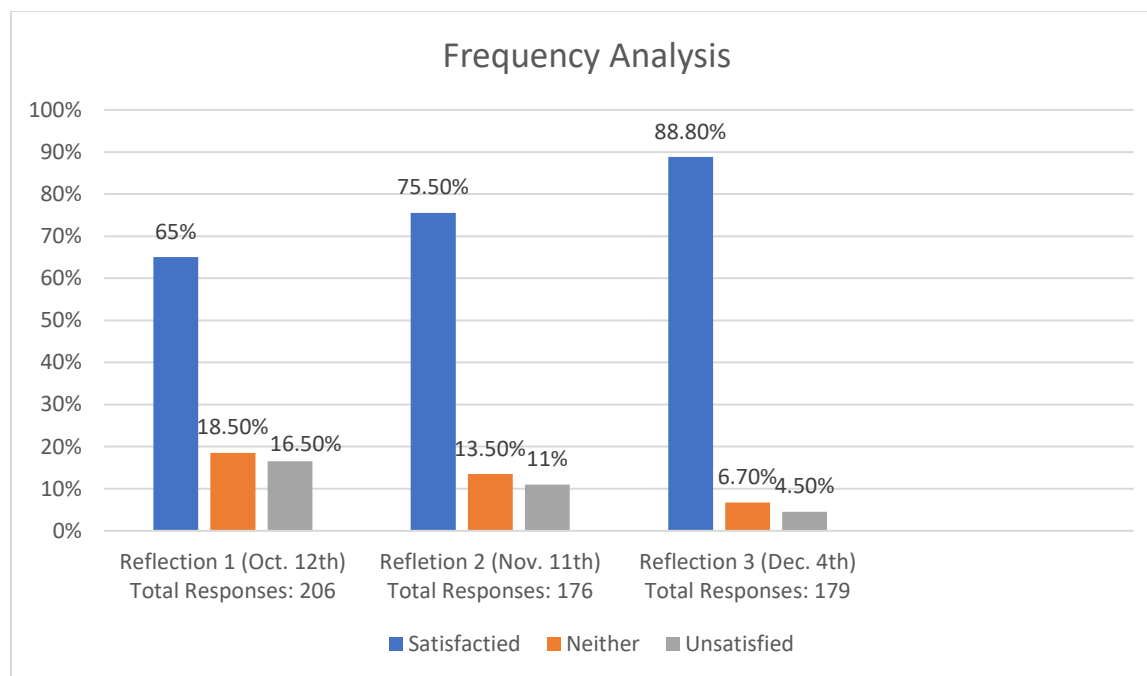
<sup>9</sup> Meaning that as feelings of satisfaction because one's Writing Center visits increased, so too did their feelings of skill, control, and preparedness.



( $n=26$ )—at a 95% confidence interval the sample size would need to be  $n=78$ —these relatively strong correlations suggest that satisfaction holds a positive and linear relationship to students' self-efficacy and locus of control orientations. This means that as students' satisfaction with their writing increases, so too do their feelings that they are more capable and skilled in their writing and they are more prepared for and in control of the writing tasks set before them.

Furthermore, out of the entire survey data set, satisfaction (Q12.1) held the only other statistically significant bivariate correlation. At a confidence level of 95%, it held a statistically significant positive linear relationship to students' belief that they do well on an assignment due to their skill (Q3), with  $P = .024$ . Although the strength of this relationship is only moderate, with  $r = .441$ , it is another indication that students' satisfaction with their writing because of their Writing Center visits has much to do with their feeling self-efficacious. This bears out further in the qualitative analysis of the reflections and interviews.

Descriptive statistics show the majority of students feeling more satisfied with their writing because of their Writing Center visits (Q12.1) with 50% of respondents marking somewhat agree, 23% marking strongly agree, and only 8% marking strongly disagree and 4% marking disagree. However, as indicated by the more-than-representative sample taken in the reflection frequency analysis (see Figure 1), students' satisfaction in their writing performance increased at a relatively consistent rate throughout the semester overall. And not only did students' dissatisfaction in their writing decrease and their satisfaction increase over the course of the semester, but the certainty of their satisfaction increased as well, as indicated by the decrease in responses coded as "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." Furthermore, readers will get a stronger sense of this increased certainty in the following qualitative sections that take



*Figure 1: Satisfaction Frequency Analysis*

representative samples of students' reflection responses (the ones that were coded to arrive at the above satisfaction frequency results). The further the semester progresses, the more clearly and certainly students are able to claim that they are satisfied with their writing performance.

Although the quantitative results strongly suggest students felt more satisfied with their writing over the semester and because of the help received or work completed in the Writing Center, the strength of this study is in the direct connection of this quantitative proof of improvement with telling qualitative insights. We know from the retention literature that satisfaction in one's academic performance is a crucial element of one's retention decision (Roberts & Stryton 2010) along with satisfaction with one's self and one's education (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Bean, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005). Reflection responses representative of the growth in these two kinds of student satisfaction are provided and analyzed below, along with complementary interview responses.

#### *4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Satisfaction with Writing/Academic Performance*

As the data from the frequency analysis suggest, by the time of the first reflection (October 12<sup>th</sup>), a sizeable portion of 103 students were ambivalent about their writing performance satisfaction (18.5%), an even larger portion than were dissatisfied (16.5%). Still, many of these students identify the Writing Center as key in attaining satisfaction in their performance and lament their lack of attendance/use of it so far. So, of the many possible coded responses available, what follows in table 2 below is representative sampling of 103 students' early connections between their satisfaction and their use of the Writing Center. This sampling was chosen based on a constant comparison method that sought to discern the most consistent patterns of students indicating current satisfaction, unclear or building satisfaction, and current dissatisfaction (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

Respondents 1's and 2's responses are illustrative of a student on the verge of becoming more fully satisfied with their writing. Respondent 1's overall satisfaction coupled with his ability to recognize areas of dissatisfaction is representative of a larger trend in the reflection 1 data. Indeed, if, as Bartholomae (1986) asserts, college writers must continually "invent the university" each time they sit down to write—meaning that they must envision whom they are writing to/with as well as what expectations are set for them—then it does take time for students to learn to produce college level writing. The data collected here indicate that these students' dissatisfaction often arose from feeling inadequate in the face of the university that they invent. Respondent 4, for example, notes that his encounter with heavier critical suggestions in the Writing Center left him "proud, but a little defeated...." Thus, in the arc of expectation reshaping

*Table 2: Satisfaction in Writing Performance as Revealed in Reflection 1*

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflection 1 Q1
1.	So far, I have been very satisfied with my performance as a writer this semester. That being said, there are definitely many areas I can improve upon that I am currently dissatisfied with. Hopefully my English classes and <b>the writing center can help me with my weaker areas.</b>
2.	Through the help I'm getting <b>in this class, I'm feeling a little better about my writing. I don't feel the most satisfied with my writing, but I do believe I am getting better</b>
3.	I feel like my writing is very sloppy and unorganized at the beginning of the year, but as I get feedback and get back into the habit of writing, then I think I am a very good writer. <b>I am dissatisfied at the moment, but feedback and the writing center tutors are helping me get to the satisfied point.</b>

Table 2 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflection 1 Q1
4.	<p>After writing my rough draft and came into the writing center for my first paper, I was proud, but a little defeated. In class we had peer review and I thought I had done a much better job than my peers, <b>but when I came into the writing center I was told another story. I brought my paper and was suggested to fix a lot of things, but I had been told how amazing I did in class through peer review. This did not leave a bad taste in my mouth, rather it made me trust the writing center more. I needed to be given a reality check that my work needed work. After having a tutor make suggestions and help me improve my writing, I truly felt confident and proud to submit my paper.</b> I was actually on the phone with my mom after I had submitted my paper and I told her that I wish I had gone to tutoring for my writing while I was in high school because of how much the writing center here had helped me take a step back and look at my paper a little differently</p>

that we see in respondent 4's response, we get a firmer notion of how Writing Center tutoring can foster in students a clearer notion of what college-level writing is as well as a how it can foster a stronger sense of satisfaction at having come closer to achieving that notion:

I brought my paper and was suggested to fix a lot of things, but I had been told how amazing I did in class through peer review. This did not leave a bad taste in my mouth, rather it made me trust the writing center more. I needed to be given a reality check that my work needed work.

Similarly, the way in which respondent 3 discusses the steps she is taking to reach satisfaction corroborate this idea that the Writing Center plays a crucial role in students achieving satisfaction after living up to the college-writing ideal they have envisioned. She begins by noting that her writing was "very sloppy and unorganized at the beginning of the year" and that she is dissatisfied at the moment because of this. However, she notes that "feedback and the writing center tutors are helping me get to the satisfied point," and it is her phrasing "get to the satisfied point" that is telling of this very spatial conception of the university and college writing she has invented, if we continue using Bartholomae's diction. For respondent 3, there is a precise point at which she will have met the writing standards set before her and achieved satisfaction, and, like respondent 4, she sees feedback from the Writing Center as crucial to reaching that point.

And although they are capable of envisioning reaching a point of satisfaction, as when respondent 3 notes that taking feedback and getting "back into the habit of writing" will help her become the good writer she thinks she is, they all identify Writing Center help as a key mechanism through which the process of reaching satisfaction is achieved. Of note also, is that these feelings of satisfaction are also described alongside feelings of increased self-efficacy and

control, which is further evidence to the interconnectedness of these experiences shown in the bivariate correlation table in the survey. Indeed, satisfaction with one's writing performance seems to have profound effects on students' self-efficacy and locus of control orientations, as indicated by Jade in her response to interview question 2 that asks her to describe a time when she felt satisfied with something she wrote and why:

Definitely the process on the first paper just because I was used to like—I write this one sentence in a paragraph and then just continue that one sentence and then like that's the whole thing. Then I just continue with something else, so it never really flowed because I just like had certain points that I would just do in each paragraph and then would never go together at all and it was like reading a bunch of different things. It didn't make any sense, so making those things flow was what we had to talk about a lot. And once I got that and saw how to rearrange into different ideas writing the rest of it and turning it in felt good.

Jade's satisfaction is earned through the delayed gratification of engaging in a process and learning how to edit her paper. This can be read as a component of her self-efficacy, specifically her skill. That she cites her uptake of this new skill and her engagement in a longer process as conducive to her satisfaction is telling of the interconnectedness of satisfaction and at least this one component of self-efficacy.

As the students moved to Reflection 2 (November 11<sup>th</sup>) their reports of satisfaction in their writing (again only in their writing and not yet in themselves as writers/learners) are marked with much more self-assurance and vigor—less surprise at their progress as well as more precision when commenting on how ENGL 103 has affected their writing. In other words, their feelings of satisfaction are articulated with less hedging and uncertainty, more confidence that

their satisfaction is caused by some tangible benefit received through working with the Writing Center. Table 3 provides representative samples that were chosen based on the same constant comparison method as those used to select responses for Table 2. The respondents are not the same students those represented in Table 2, so these responses should not be read as an indication of individuals students' longitudinal changes in satisfaction.

Respondent 1 offers a clear example of a student who, now after crossing the midpoint of the semester, claims unequivocally that they are satisfied and that the Writing Center has a large part to do with that. His one-word response "Satisfied" establishes the succinctness that characterizes the certainty in the rest of his response: "My writing has only improved this semester. The writing center plays an integral role in my writing." Such clear satisfaction with his academic performance is what retention scholars might isolate as a positive predictor to that students' willingness to commit to a university. As a useful and brief connection to retention, it is helpful to note that, in his landmark 1975 longitudinal model, Tinto asserts that "academic integration," which can be understood as the degree to which a student feels academically connected and committed to their institution via success in class, research outside of class, or even interactions with faculty, is a crucial part of all students' retention decision. Moreover, the National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report notes that the higher students' satisfaction with their education, the more likely they are to commit to their institution (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017). Thus, if because of Writing Center help, students display a stronger academic integration because of achieving more success and therefore becoming more committed to their institution, the Writing Center can play a vital role in students' retention decisions. Respondent 4 depicts just such an increased commitment when she notes that the Writing Center not only helps her improve her writing but also makes her enthusiastic about her academic future:



*Table 3: Satisfaction in Writing Performance as Revealed in Reflection 2*

Respondents	Coded Responses to Reflection 2 Q1
1.	Satisfied. My writing has only improved this semester. <b>The writing center plays an integral role in my writing.</b>
2.	I would not say that I am satisfied but I have definitely grown as a writer in many different ways. <b>Both the writing center and my English 101 course have challenged my writing and helped me discover the flaws in how I write and think.</b>
3.	I feel satisfied with my writing. I feel like with practice and learning from my mistakes, <b>I have immensely improved my writing skills. This is to thank from the writing center</b> as well whose tutors have offered me great advice.
4.	So far, I have been really satisfied with my writing. I have maintained a good grade in English, although the papers continuously get harder as the semester progresses. I have never written papers in these formats before so I am still getting used to it and still learning. <b>The writing center has been a huge help and I will definitely continue to use it in the future.</b> I have so much to learn and improve upon with my writing and I am excited to see how I continue to get more comfortable with it in the future.

The writing center has been a huge help and I will definitely continue to use it in the future. I have so much to learn and improve upon with my writing and I am excited to see how I continue to get more comfortable with it in the future.

Again, if students are feeling more satisfied with their writing and are thus academically integrating more deeply into the university, then the Writing Center represents a profound player in the institution's retention efforts. For students, it becomes a place where they improve their academics and increase their feelings of connection to the university simultaneously.

Also of note is that respondents 2 & 3 outline clearly the connection they feel between feeling satisfied with their writing and feeling more in control and self-efficacious. And despite their differences in satisfaction, both point to the Writing Center as the central reason for being able to more precisely identify flaws in their writing and learn from their mistakes. Respondent 2's response enacts a larger trend to be examined in chapter 6 on locus of control, which is that help in the Writing Center enables students to better know themselves as writers, their flaws and their strengths. For, although respondent 2 notes he is not satisfied, he sees growth and the potential for reaching satisfaction because "Both the writing center and my English 101 course have challenged my writing and helped me discover the flaws in how I write and think." Indeed, as students have passed the midpoint in the semester, students articulate with greater certainty that satisfaction is intimately linked with their feelings of self-efficacy and control over their writing performance. Take respondent 3 as an example of these connections: "I feel satisfied with my writing. I feel like with practice and learning from my mistakes, I have immensely improved my writing skills. This is to thank from the writing center as well whose tutors have offered me great advice." Not only does she locate control in herself when she notes that practice and learning from her mistakes have improved her writing, but such activities are the causal link

to her satisfaction. If we are to consider how writing centers might be promoting student retention, we should understand that satisfaction as an contributing element to retention is fostered through the promotion of other experiences, precisely those named here as self-efficacy and locus of control.

From a glance at interviewee Emma's response to interview question 2 (Could you tell me about a time in which you felt satisfied with something you wrote?), we see a multiplicity of experiences converging to create a satisfied writer:

It was the most recent paper [an academic position paper that represents their second-to-last major assignment] because we had to use outside research, and I was nervous about finding sources....The satisfying part was beginning the research here [in the Writing Center] and ending here because the tutor that helped me helped me revise all the way through and told me that my arguments made more and more sense the more I kept going. And I ended up making a good grade on that which was what really felt good.

Not only did Emma's confidence increase as she received validation from the tutor, but her actual grade inspired feelings of satisfaction. As we know from the retention literature (Tinto 1975; Tinto 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005) academic performance itself (meaning primarily grades) heavily influences every aspect of a student's life, including, of course, their belief in themselves, their satisfaction, and ultimately their decision to persist. Respondent 2 from Table 3 did in fact self-report having received a No Credit (NC) on his first paper, while respondent 3 self-reported a 97/100 for his. This should serve as an adequate reminder that although these experiences of increased satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control are powerful for freshman students, grades are certainly not the end-all or be-all with regards to student success, let alone retention. Sometimes it is more important and a potential marker for future success to

feel satisfied or confident or in control than to have a current grade that reflects those feelings. But as Emma's response above suggests, academic success is still the one of the largest contributors to satisfaction and is consequently the largest and most reliable predictor of retention.

That said, Reflection 3 holds stronger evidence that students are seeing the desired benefits of 103. As was shown in Figure 1, Reflection 3 saw 103 students achieve an 88.8% satisfaction rate according to their reflections, and this expressed itself in the qualitative data with even more certainty and enthusiasm (see Table 4). And like tables 2 & 3, Table 4 provides representative samples that were chosen using the same constant comparison method.

Responses to Reflection 3 show increased certainty in satisfaction such as respondent 2's response that "I am more satisfied than I expected because I could get help from the writing center and feedback on my papers and I was able to get better scores" or respondent 1 noting that she is "very satisfied" and that she believes she can continue to improve with the help of the Writing Center. The larger trend of the responses to Reflection 3 Q1 was one of feeling satisfied at increasing one's confidence, feelings of personal control over the performance, or one's particular writing skills—such as when respondent 3 remarks that she feels more capable of organizing, developing, and conveying her ideas.

Like the trends noted in the previous reflections, there is a confluence of experiences alongside increased satisfaction. Respondent 3 connects her feelings of satisfaction to the increase in confidence she gained by using the Writing Center; respondent 2, from her improved grades that she attributes to working with the Writing Center; respondent 1, from her understanding that she has control over how to prepare for and enact the writing process. In a way, this is significant because each Q1 for the three reflections asks only that students describe

*Table 4: Satisfaction in Writing Performance as Revealed in Reflection 3*

Respondents	Coded Responses to Reflection 3 Q1
1.	I am very satisfied with my writing this semester. Indeed, I understand I cannot become a phenomenal writer overnight. However, <b>through constant practice of writing various text and constant feedback from professional writers, then my writing skills will significantly improve.</b>
2.	I am more satisfied than I expected <b>because I could get help from the writing center and feedback on my papers and I was able to get better scores.</b>
3.	I think that <b>this class really allowed me to hone in on my writing style, and helped organize and convey my ideas well.</b> I am satisfied with how I was able to develop essays that I'm excited to turn in, because I feel very confident about them.
4.	Overall, I feel satisfied. <b>At first, my satisfaction came from the approval of my professor [via the Writing Center], but towards the end, my satisfaction came from self-approval of my writing.</b>

their satisfaction—how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel about their writing. The amount of explanatory commentary from the students implies that satisfaction is perhaps one experience that students feel is achieved directly through the other experiences of increased self-efficacy or internalization of locus of control and, of course, at the very least through improved grades/writing quality. This is obvious given that satisfaction, like thankfulness or anger, is a disposition we experience that usually requires a prepositional phrase after its use: e.g., “I am satisfied *about* X,” in the same way “I am thankful *for* Y.” But that students continually fill in that X with 1) their work/help in the Writing Center and 2) relevant retention factors (self-efficacy and locus of control) is telling of their interconnectedness, of their presence and reliability in this setting. Whether it be improved skills or self-identification (respondents 1 & 3 respectively) or a more sharpened sense of where control and consequently satisfaction should lie (respondent 4), these students’ responses exhibit an acute awareness of the connection between Writing Center tutoring and increased self-efficacy, and locus of control. And as we will see moving into students’ satisfaction of themselves as learners not just as writers, this interconnectedness only tightens as students contemplate their satisfaction in improving their softer habits and skills that transfer beyond writing.

#### *4.3 Qualitative Analysis of Satisfaction with Self as Learner*

Because the consistent increase in students’ satisfaction with their writing performance has been demonstrated (in both the frequency analysis and the qualitative analysis) in the previous section, what appears here is a representation of reflection data taken from all three reflections. A similar constant comparison method was employed to select examples of students’ satisfaction with themselves as learners. This time, the constant comparison method employed relied on the interpretation and reinterpretation of students’ satisfaction being attributable to an

element of themselves as writers/learner that has changed, improved, or that they have become aware of through their work in the Writing Center.

Initially, the coded responses shown in Table 5 will appear like those examined for students' satisfaction in their writing performance. And, indeed, these responses do exhibit students indicating their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their writing performance. But these responses were coded primarily for what follows students' remarks about their writing performance satisfaction. For example, when respondent 3 notes that he is dissatisfied with his writing, he continues by adding that his potential for satisfaction hinges on himself as a student, explaining "if I spend more time in the writing center and actually talk and listen to tutors then I will become more successful." The same pattern emerges for respondent 2 when she notes her satisfaction has arisen from a certain personal accountability: "I feel proud for using the writing center to help me because I have always known that I have needed help with my writing and I am finally getting it." Essentially, this category of satisfaction highlights what the students discern in themselves between the product they produce and the version of themselves as students who produced it. For most, this discernment is something of a journey and follows closely the pattern of the other relevant dispositions (self-efficacy and locus of control), which is to say it begins with recognition often brought on by working with Writing Center tutors. Respondents 5 and 6 enact this pattern of recognizing personal learning habits and shortcomings, which then produces feelings of satisfaction at having completed what feels like a journey. Note the temporal markers in their responses: "**At first** [emphasis added] I was really intimidated by college level papers, **but once** I realized that the writing center was really helpful **I became** less intimidated and more likely to ask for help" and "**Now** I know what I'm capable of...." This journey that students take towards knowing themselves and then addressing aspects of

Table 5: Satisfaction with Self as Learner as Revealed in Reflections 1, 2, & 3

Respondents	Coded Responses to Reflection 1, 2, & 3 Q1
1. (Reflection 1)	<p><b>I feel satisfied with how much time and effort I put into my paper, I had it reviewed and re-reviewed multiple times and went through several drafts.</b> When I got my grade back I was happy with what I got and felt proud of my work.</p>
2. (Reflection 2)	<p>I am very satisfied with my performance as a writer so far. I have not gotten any scores back but I feel confident that my writing has improved since being here. <b>I feel proud for using the writing center to help me because I have always known that I have needed help with my writing and I am finally getting it.</b></p>
3. (Reflection 1)	<p>I am dissatisfied with my writing thus far, yet I believe <b>if I spend more time in the writing center and actually talk and listen to tutors then I will become more successful.</b></p>
4. (Reflection 3)	<p>My writing has definitely improved and I am satisfied with my performance so far. At first I was really intimidated by college level papers, <b>but once I realized that the writing center was really helpful I became less intimidated and more likely to ask for help.</b></p>
5. (Reflection 3)	<p>I feel great in my writing performance this year. <b>I'm really glad I joined ENG 103 because it has made English easier and less stressful. Now, I know what I'm capable of and I know if I start the assignment right away I will get a good grade.</b></p>



themselves that hinder their production is crucial to achieving satisfaction with themselves and their education.

Respondent 1 represents an ideal end goal to this journey of self-fulfillment and independence when she notes her satisfaction is drawn from “how much time and effort” was put into her paper and the fact that she “had it reviewed and re-reviewed multiple times and went through several drafts.” Similarly, respondent 2 prides herself in observing that “I have always known that I have needed help with my writing and I am finally getting it.” For both, choosing to engage the help of the Writing Center as part of their own writing processes is the key contributor to their satisfaction. Moreover, respondent 3’s and 4’s observations, despite differing satisfactions at the times of their writing (with respondent 3 feeling dissatisfied and respondent 4 feeling satisfied), attribute their success to receiving open and consistent help from the Writing Center. This follows previous examples that indicate students’ strong and reliable ability to isolate tutoring as a benefit to them regardless of personal and immediate success or satisfaction levels. Respondent 3 even cites the Writing Center as the piece missing to his future success: “I believe if I spend more time in the writing center and actually talk and listen to tutors then I will become more successful.”

The whole arc of this project is to pin down and articulate what students feel is at stake when they step into the WC—what they feel they are wrangling with and what aspects of their study habits, knowledge, or dispositions. they feel are being shaped. What we see indicated time and again is that students feel their confidence, control, and satisfaction with writing are all being influenced somehow via the WC. They feel that through the acts of revising and talking with WC tutors, they are improving their learning identities, most often away from one of fear, procrastination, ineptness, and dissatisfaction and towards one of confidence, immediacy, clarity,

and contentment. The responses examined here show that once students are made aware of themselves as writers—made aware of their writerly patterns, strengths, and weaknesses—they can aim precisely at improvements and begin their journey from stronger, more familiar footing. And key in this for researchers and practitioners alike is our own awareness that our students find their clearest and most direct path to satisfaction via good grades, improved confidence, heightened sense of control and self-awareness, and a belief that the variables that decide an outcome are more firmly in their hands. Students' satisfaction with themselves as learners and with their academic performance is one sign that they are integrating well and that they feel their education is worth it to them. And so far as this chapter shows, students' work in the Writing Center is a significant contributor to that satisfaction. In fact, the Writing Center, for many students, stands out as one of the sole reasons they feel satisfied with their college writing and their first-year composition courses. Time and again, students cite their work in the Writing Center as a necessary step in feeling as though they attained the goals set before them as first-year writers.

## 5. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined here as a students' belief that they are prepared and capable to complete a task. Using that definition, self-efficacy has been coded in three distinct ways: preparedness, skill, and confidence. Qualitative responses were coded for preparedness when students noted that the Writing Center affected, in some way, their feelings of preparedness to complete a task, the same applying to the codes skill and confidence. In the retention literature, there is sometimes a bifurcation between academic self-efficacy, which is conducive to better academic performance, and a more general self-efficacy, which is conducive to social and mental stability. This study makes no distinction in its definition of self-efficacy but instead relies on the three codes to encompass both types of self-efficacy. There is precedent in the retention literature (Putwain et al., 2013) to see the two possible types of self-efficacy as occurring simultaneously, that is, in the same settings and for the same purposes. And although this study examines mostly students' academic self-efficacy, readers should not divest themselves of the notion that academic self-efficacy is disconnected to students' sense of self-efficacy as students more broadly.

The retention literature makes clear that students who report high senses of self-efficacy persist at higher rates, primarily because their academic performance and academic integration improve as their sense of self-efficacy heightens (Choi, 2005; Ferla et al., 2009; Gore, 2006). However, higher sense of self-efficacy is also associated with increased ability to cope and emotional stability, which has significant effects on retention as well (Davenport & Lane, 2006). What follows is an exploration of how writing centers encourage primarily academic self-efficacy, but the more general self-efficacy as well.

### 5.1 Quantitative Analysis of Self-Efficacy

As mentioned in Chapter 4, satisfaction brought about through one's writing center (Q12.1) visits was the only survey item to hold statistically significant relationships with several other survey items. However, survey item 12.2 (increased skill because of the Writing Center) held a statistically significant positive linear relationship to survey item 12.4 (increased preparedness because the Writing Center) at a 99% confidence level, with  $P < .001$  and  $r = .740$ . Survey item 12.2 also held a statistically significant positive linear relationship to item 12.3 (increased feelings of control in performance because of Writing Center visits) at 99% confidence level with  $P = .006$  and  $r = .731$ . And, as was discussed at the beginning of chapter 4, item 12.2 also had a statistically significant positive linear relationship with item 12.1.

Descriptive statistics reveal that students held mostly strong agreement that the Writing Center increased their feelings of skill (Q12.2) and preparedness (Q12.4). 53.8% marked they either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed to Q12.2, and only 10% indicated any level of disagreement. Alternatively, survey item 12.4 saw more concerted agreement with 42.3% marking somewhat agree and 42.3% marking strongly agree, leaving only 7.6% to neither agree nor disagree and 3.8% to somewhat disagree and the remaining 3.8% to strongly disagree. This stronger and more uniform agreement is reflected in the preparedness frequency analysis taken from Reflections 1 & 2 (see Table 6). Overall, however, these descriptive statistics show that students mostly agree that their Writing Center visits are increasing their skill and preparedness.

As is evident from the frequency coding, students' feelings of preparedness for writing their ENGL 101 papers improved dramatically from reflection 1 to 2. And although survey items 12.2 and 12.4 exhibited some disagreement and ambivalence, the preparedness frequency analysis suggests an upward trend in self-efficacy. Moreover, the qualitative responses mostly

*Table 6: Preparedness Frequency Analysis*

	Reflection 1 (Oct. 12 <sup>th</sup> )	Reflection 2 (Nov. 11 <sup>th</sup> )
Prepared	Total: 129 Percentage: 64%	Total: 147 Percentage: 85%
Neither	Total: 15 Percentage: 7.4%	Total: 11 Percentage: 5.5%
Unprepared	Total: 57 Percentage: 28.4%	Total: 15 Percentage: 7.5%

believe the notions that the Writing Center makes students feel less prepared, less skilled, or less confident. Indeed, seeking help and using help is a skill that all students must acquire and develop, so the responses of disagreement to survey items 12.2 and 12.4 seem often to be reflected in the qualitative data as increased confusion because of miscommunication, distrust, or dislike between student and tutor.

Thus far, the Writing Center's promotion of academic self-efficacy appears relatively strong by the numbers. What follows will primarily demonstrate the improvements students felt in their self-efficacy while also giving nod to that phenomena of embracing a tutor's help effectively (which will also see further discussion in chapter 6).

### *5.2 Qualitative Analysis of Self-efficacy: Preparedness*

As was done for satisfaction the qualitative responses between reflections 1 and 2 have been separated to help illustrate a shift in students' orientations towards their preparedness and the Writing Center's role in it. Samples provided below contain coded responses from question 2 (How prepared did you feel for completing your most recent paper successfully, what did you

learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do the next time you write a paper?) of Reflection 1 (See Table 7).

Respondent 1's closing remark about the tutors that "I didn't use them to the best of my ability but that helps me prepare for the future," suggests not only that she's become more prepared because of Writing Center but that she's learned the value of preparation. Indeed, like the other students, especially respondent 4 when he notes "I was not all that prepared before I visited the writing center," respondent 1 finds direct causality in having help from the our tutors and feeling prepared, saying, "I felt prepared because I had help from the writing center and from my instructor." This type of causality is linked with temporal markers in many other responses as well, as students consistently emphasize when feelings of preparedness developed for them. For example, respondent 2 notes "**After** [emphasis added] stopping by the writing center and talking to multiple tutors, I **began** to feel better prepared." Likewise, respondent 3 suggests her improved preparedness and confidence are steps in her writing process, commenting "I will most definitely **remember to start early** on my next paper, so I can take advantage of working with tutors." Students employment of these temporal markers suggests a keen awareness for when in the stages in their writing processes and in their overall learning development they begin to feel prepared. Notably, it consistently occurs around visits to tutors.

For the majority of these students, describing feelings of preparedness comes with implicit recollection, mention, and even celebration of increased satisfaction or improvements in locus of control orientation or other elements of self-efficacy. Respondent 5 felt more prepared because she now knows she starts her writing in disorganization and that she can begin with more attention to framing her approach, which is an articulation of a strong internal locus of control orientation. Respondent 3 felt more prepared because she has increased confidence (self-

Table 7: Preparedness as Revealed in Reflection 1

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflection 1 Q2
1.	<p><b>I felt prepared because I had help from the writing center</b> and from my instructor. I knew I had all the resources I needed In front of me. I didn't use them to the best of my ability but that helps me prepare for the future.</p>
2.	<p>Before writing my paper I felt very under-prepared. <b>After stopping by the writing center and talking to multiple tutors, I began to feel better prepared.</b> Throughout the process of writing my first essay, I realized that I am not the best writer, and that's okay because I have plenty of people to help me along the way. For my future papers I want to remember that it's okay to ask for help when writing a paper or trying to understand writing concepts.</p>
3.	<p>I felt very prepared. Especially because <b>I got to meet with Daisy</b> [pseudonym] <b>in the writing center, and she is my TA in my English class. After I received help in the writing center I felt more confident in my work, and I was aware of what I needed to spend more time working on.</b> I will most definitely remember to start early on my next paper, <b>so I can take advantage of working with tutors.</b></p>
4.	<p><b>I was not all that prepared before I visited the writing center.</b> But, after I talked with a tutor at the writing center I felt 100% better about writing my paper.</p>

Table 7 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflection 1 Q2
5.	<p><b>I felt pretty prepared since I met with a tutor when I was struggling to even start writing the paper and she helped me a lot.</b> I learned how disorganized I was before writing a paper and how it made me take so long to write. I want to remember that I should organize my thoughts and make a frame before starting so I can do a better job when I actually write.</p>

efficacy) stemming from better awareness of what requires more attention in her writing and the fact that getting her work done early will allow her to seek help (another indication of a strong internal locus of control orientation). Respondent 3 felt more prepared because she was able to see her performance predicated on the controllable variables of her effort and ability to seek help (locus of control as well). Overall, Reflection 1 shows that not only do these students feel increasingly prepared because of the Writing Center and better able to articulate why they feel more prepared, but they also experience changes to other retention-related factors alongside their improvements to preparedness.

In Reflection 2 (Table 7) we see some of those students who did not take advantage of the WC or who didn't feel prepared, make direct mention of their improvement in these areas because of WC visits. Table 8 presents representative samples of coded responses from Reflection 2 Q2 (Thinking about the second major paper you wrote this semester: How prepared did you feel for completing it successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do differently when you write your next paper?).

As one could have inferred from the preparedness frequency analysis (Table 6), students began to self-correct what was blocking their preparation for their papers, but, beyond that, they



Table 8: Preparedness in Reflection 2

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflection 2 Q2
1.	I definitely felt more prepared for the second paper versus the first one. <b>I think this has to do with my utilization of the resources in the writing center (tutors, quiet place to write)</b> , as well as becoming more comfortable with the expectations my teacher has set for each paper. If I were to do anything differently, I would get more help from my teacher so I know exactly what they are looking for.
2.	I was way more prepared this time than I was last time. <b>The tutors gave me valuable tips that helped me.</b> I learned that I am a decent writer. For my next paper I need to proofread more.
3.	<b>I prepared for it by going to the tutoring center more.</b> And taking it a lot more seriously. <b>I will keep going to the writing lab- because it simply helps me.</b>
4.	I felt I was prepared pretty good compared to the first one. <b>I learned that I should ask for feedback on my final draft because I felt I was better prepared by doing it than when I did the first one.</b> I want to remember to read out loud to see if everything makes sense and get help on grammar errors and what to do to improve from the writing center.

recognize tutoring help as the central component in making this self-correction. Respondents 1, 2, and 4 all distinguish their feelings of preparedness, confidence in submitting, and success from their first assignment to their most recent. They note marked improvement primarily because of increased capacities to see their own mistakes (respondent 4), understand the expectations and parameters of the assignments (respondent 1), and trust their own abilities as writers (respondent 2). As we see in respondent 3, the link between feeling prepared and visiting the Writing Center is clear: “I will keep going to the writing lab- because it simply helps me.” But what is more notable is that by noting their improved preparedness, each student sees clearly their next scholarly move. Respondent 1 now knows to visit his teacher more often: “If I were to do anything differently, I would get more help from my teacher.” Respondent 2 sees the value in proofreading himself: “For my next paper I need to proofread more.” Respondent 3, without needing to reinvent the wheel, will simply make return visits to the writing center: “I will keep going to the writing lab- because it simply helps me.” And respondent 4 has learned to ask for more feedback while also adopting the tactic of reading aloud, as is often done in Writing Center tutorials: “I want to remember to read out loud to see if everything makes sense and get help on grammar errors and what to do to improve from the writing center.” These comments underscore the notion that students’ increased metacognitive awareness for these retention-related dispositions (satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control) often comes with increased awareness for other aspects of themselves as learners. That is, for example, the more aware students become of the notion of preparedness (and specifically the level of preparedness required in college-level writing), the more they turn to other learning dispositions with efforts to change them. What’s key in these responses is that the Writing Center represents for many of these students the initial encounter with this phenomenon of being able to change how one

prepares, how confident one is, how one can envision reaching satisfaction, or how one can be more open to seeking help.

### *5.3 Qualitative Analysis of Self-efficacy: Skill*

Skill as a component of self-efficacy emerged as a relevant code and was not a part of the initial coding scheme. Through seeing students comment that because they had learned specific techniques, skills, or habits, they felt more capable, it seemed necessary to add skill as a subcategory—especially since feelings of self-belief in writing largely do hinge on knowing tricks and techniques that smooth, refine, and make more efficient one’s writing and writing process. The following coded responses (Table 9) from a few different reflection questions will broach some representative points of note regarding skill as an indication of self-efficacy.

In her response, respondent 1 echoes the show-but-don’t-instruct, explain-but-don’t-rewrite goal of writing center pedagogy when she claims she learned to edit her own paper after her Writing Center visits. While respondent 2 also recognizes a tangible skill being developed through her work with tutors, respondent 4 feels that softer learning skills or what she calls habits (time-management and dedication) are promoted through her work in ENGL 103 and believes that to such a degree that she’s signed up for ENGL 104 for the next semester. That students can identify more than page-level improvements in their skill and zoom out to encompass those softer learning skills that are so volatile during the first year is telling of a strong connection between self-efficacy and writing center work.

Similarly, interviewee Hayley mentions in response to interview question 5 (about how she would gauge her confidence now versus the beginning of the semester and to what she owes any change) that her adoption of the skills conferred to her during her tutoring sessions leads to an increase in capability/self-sufficiency: “I definitely feel like they gave me the tools to do it on

*Table 9: Self-efficacy through Skill as Revealed in Reflections 1, 2, &3*

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflections 1, 2, & 3
<p>1. (Reflection 2: Q2): Thinking about the second major paper you wrote this semester: How prepared did you feel for completing it successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do differently when you write your next paper?)</p>	<p>I felt more prepared for the second paper <b>after coming to the Writing Center and learning how to edit my first paper.</b></p>
<p>2. (Reflection 2 Q2)</p>	<p>I felt very prepared with this most recent paper <b>due to the help I got from one of the tutors here. My tutor really helped me focus my writing and provided a structure diagram to help me stay on topic. I learned a lot about my own structure issues when I write a paper. I</b> want to remember how to structure my papers as well as I did in this previous paper.</p>

Table 9 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflections 1, 2, & 3
<p>3. (Reflection 1 Q3): At this point in the semester, what are you struggling with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? What has most helped you address these challenges; and, what do you need to do to address them?)</p>	<p>As a student I am most struggling with feeling that I have met the expectations set for me. <b>Coming to the Writing Center has helped me improve the structure of my essays and reading my essays from end to beginning has helped with my word usage.</b> I have not yet discovered how to manage my feelings of inadequacy, but I think that this will improve later in the semester. To further improve my writing, I just need to continue to work with tutors.</p>
<p>4. (Reflection 3 Q3): Looking back on the entire semester, what did you struggle with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? And, what helped you most to address these challenges (including things you did?)</p>	<p>Time management and dedication to studying out of class were issues for me as a first-year student. <b>The writing center has helped me greatly improve upon these qualities and I plan to take the 104 section of the course in order to instill these good habits further.</b></p>

my own so I don't have to come to seek someone else's aid as much, but I definitely feel like a lot of the stuff I needed beforehand I can do now on my own." Even further, students indicate that they envision these skills applying beyond the Writing Center and beyond UTK's first-year writing, to quote Emma in her response to interview question 6 (about her Writing Center takeaways): "For one I would hope that the writing skills that I learned from seeing the tutors—I want to be able to use that in other classes because I feel like my other classes are going to ask me to be writing papers and not just English papers." So here, as we progress to writing skills, the notion of writing transfer, a student's ability to adapt prior knowledge to new and distinct contexts, comes into play. With a high degree of metacognition, another transfer-related term that denotes a student's conscious awareness of writing contours, processes, and distinctions, the knowledge of which make transfer more efficient, Emma is able to foresee her Writing Center takeaways as not just serving her immediate classes and challenges, but as conducive to future success. Recalling academic integration as a key factor in students' retention decisions, a student such as Emma, who looks to carry forward the skills she's learned in the Writing Center, is all but consciously aiming for academic integration. In part, we can assume this aim is because she sees what she's learned is valuable and further encouraging to commit to continuing her education.

As was alluded to in the previous subchapter, not all of these experiences coincide with one another: respondent 3 proclaims specific improvements to structure and word usage but sandwiches that proclamation between comments on her struggles as a student rather than simply her writing. It appears for her, the Writing Center is a space reserved for improvement in writing, not in her "feelings of inadequacy" which might fall under self-efficacy. Her follow up implies as much, musing on the distinction "To further improve my writing, I just need to continue to

work with tutors.” Interestingly, this echoes interviewee Hayley’s comments about the distinction between an academic coach she visited frequently during the fall 2018 semester from UTK’s student success center and the writing center. When asked about the difference she felt between going to a tutor and her academic coach, she replied:

With the WC it’s different because you’re talking directly about a work that you’re doing, so you have it there in front of you and they’re looking at it with you. With the academic coach, we sort of—not necessarily about the writing itself but more of me as a writer. So it sort of helped in both areas, and I valued both because I knew when it was time for me to go to each: I went to my academic coach when I was struggling with anxiety or time management and the Writing Center when I needed help on the actual writing.

For some students, perhaps because of the limitations of individual tutor meetings to provide an all-encompassing service or also perhaps because students conceptualize the Writing Center as a location restricted only to the engagement of tangible writing results, the Writing Center does not offer improvements to various aspects of their learning dispositions. The most likely answer so far appears to be that students simply conceptualize it in that way; Hayley herself even credits the Writing Center, in her response to the first interview question, with being the biggest factor in her improved confidence:

When I came in, I was not a very confident writer just because I don’t feel like the level of learning experience that my peers had, I don’t think mine was as good as theirs. I just didn’t feel like I had a grasp on what was going on, but when I started coming here—meeting with the 101 tutors was what really helped me the most. Sort of feel comfortable

writing on my own for my assignments and such. I feel like I would not be as comfortable here if I had not had the Writing Center.

So what, to respondent 3 or Hayley, might appear to be dispositions unaffected by the work they do in the Writing Center, are dispositions largely influenced, in fact, by what seems like pure academic input: learning new skills or receiving help on writing. This explanation is not conclusive, but it does help address this retention-related problem, which is that some students see the writing center as a place that does not affect their learning dispositions, and instead only affects their writing.

#### *5.4 Qualitative Analysis of Self-efficacy: Confidence*

Students' reports that their Writing Center visits increased their confidence were ubiquitous across all reflections their individual questions. Besides satisfaction and preparedness which were inquired about directly, it was the most prevalently cited disposition by our students. It was also, however, the disposition elaborated on least. Students remarks about their confidence were simple and often without explanation. So what follows is a representative sample of those simpler responses that simply claim that the Writing Center increased confidence, while a few non-representative samples represent those few, more detailed responses. Table 10 contains confidence coded responses from multiple reflection questions, indicated beside the respondent number.

Again, responses 1 & 2 do not indicate much beyond the fact that students feel the Writing Center has improved their confidence. Respondent 1 does illustrate that students do feel repeat visits to the Writing Center helped increase their confidence while cementing the notion that many students enter college with great trepidation and lacking confidence.

Respondent 3 further supports this notion that confidence is lacking in many first-year



Table 10: Self-efficacy through Confidence as Revealed in Reflections 1, 2, &3

Respondent	Coded Responses to Reflections 1, 2, & 3
1. (Reflection 3 Q2)	I feel better than when I started college. Going in, I was not very confident in my writing skills, <b>but after coming to the writing center on multiple occasions, I feel more confident.</b>
2. (Reflection 1 Q1)	<b>Since taking both English 103 and 198, I feel more satisfied and confident with my writing.</b>
3. (Reflection 3 Q2)	This semester, I learned a lot about myself as a writer. Coming in to the semester, I was not confident at all and had a hard time concentrating and getting my ideas into writing, however, <b>after all the help I have received, I can easily write a decent paper with no stress. I learned that I usually wait until the last minute with writing, but after I started getting things done ahead of time, I was a lot less stressed and way more confident.</b> I also learned that coming to the writing center does not make me look dumb, it actually really helped me improve my writing.
4. (Reflection 1 Q1)	I feel more satisfied with my writing skills because now I know how important it is just to go back over your work and check for simple mistakes. It is also good to get with a tutor because they help you put your thoughts on paper and be as specific as possible. <b>I never wrote a CRA [comparative rhetorical analysis] and the writing center has helped me be confident in my writing.</b>

writers. Moreover, he conflates a lack of confidence with stress, and cites the help he's received as the reason for learning that his procrastination contributes to stress and decreased confidence. So not only do students feel more confident because of their Writing Center visits, but they also become better aware of what makes affects their confidence. The transition from feeling unconfident to becoming able to articulate what affects confidence is one echoed by interviewee Hayley in her response to interview question 1 (How would you describe your experience as a first-year writer at UT and in ENGL 103?):

When I came in I was not a very confident writer just because I don't feel like the level of learning experience that my peers had, I don't think mine was as good as theirs. I just didn't feel like I had a grasp on what was going on, but when I started coming here—meeting with the 101 tutors was what really helped me the most. Sort of feel comfortable writing on my own for my assignments and such, just realizing I'm more confident when know what I'm supposed to be doing. I feel like I would not be as comfortable here if I had not had the Writing Center.

This move from being unconfident to confident, and knowing why that is, is a powerful tool in students' academic mission. As discussed in the next chapter, self-awareness is key to so much their academic careers, and it has profound affects on their ability to persist to graduation. It can mean the difference between respondent 4 productively recognizing that a comparative rhetorical analysis is a new genre as he has done, and him failing to complete the assignment because his approach comes from a lack of awareness for how he writes and what the genre requires.

Likewise, students being able to articulate what gives them confidence can mean the difference between them approaching a difficult assignment with productive and doable steps in mind, and

failing to conduct themselves in way that most benefits them, most allows them to be a self-efficacious student.

## 6. Locus of Control

Locus of control (LOC) is defined here as an individual's conception of where control over the outcomes of events/performance is located; it is an orientation toward control that can either be internal or external. Specifically, students with strong internal LOC orientations believe the outcomes of their academics to be in their control, not, for instance in the control of solely their professors, administrators, or tutors. Students with strong external LOC orientations believe the opposite, that their academic performance is in control of external forces such as the whims of their professor or the competence of a tutor.

Students with strong internal LOC orientations are more likely to be well-adjusted socially and emotionally especially in new environments (Drago et al., 2018). They are also more likely to function self-sufficiently and are less likely to procrastinate (Drago et al., 2018). Conversely, students with strong external LOC orientations are more likely to hold lower GPA's, and more likely to be affected by negative emotions and to exhibit a tense obedience that is the result of feeling loss of control (Drago et al., 2018).

Readers can conceive of students' LOC orientations toward college academics and writing being influenced and indicated by many variables. Students' willingness to seek help, whether they use that help with personal agency or as a crutch, whether they believe their teacher's expectations allow for only one way of writing or one particular ideal product, all affect or inform a student's LOC orientation. So too does their belief that their performance is influenced by mutable qualities such as their own effort, skill, time management, or use of resources. Analysis of students' LOC orientations was conducted using three distinctive codes that emerged frequently within the data, each representing a particular variable or indicator of our students' larger LOC orientations. Each highlight an element of students' LOC orientations

changing because of their Writing Center visits but, of course, do not necessarily reflect a student's entire orientation changing from say internally oriented to externally oriented.

The three codes are 1) self-identification 2) willingness/ability to seek help and 3) belief in performance being predicated on mutable variables. Responses were coded for "self-identification" when students remarked that the Writing Center had made them aware of their writing or general learning strengths and weaknesses or improved their own ability to know themselves as learners and identify potential problems in their learning. Most often, responses were coded for self-identification when students realized they didn't know something or know how to do something. This code is relevant to students' larger internal-external LOC orientation because self-identification—which is defined here as one's capacity to know themselves as writers and learners and to identify shortcomings in their approach and execution of writing—is linked to an individual's performance of their LOC orientation. That is, in order for students to exhibit a *successful* internal LOC orientation that houses performance outcomes within the students themselves and not in uncontrollable factors, students must engage in self-identification that allows for knowing and reevaluating one's self such that that self might be adapted or changed to meet new challenges.

Responses were coded for "willingness/ability to seek help" when students remarked that the Writing Center had increased their acceptance of help, improved their skill at using help, or made their notions of seeking help more positive and less an indication of their failure as a student. The manner in which a student engages with resources and academic help can betray that student's LOC orientation and subsequently affect the way that help is used. More than that, in the retention literature, students' perceptions of positive experiences with academic resources and faculty such as professors, tutors, and advisors is correlated with increased retention

(Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). So if students' use of the Writing Center promotes further use of academic assistance and teaches them how to do so properly, the Writing Center could come to represent a valuable introduction to academic assistance, which means that Writing Centers foster retention-promoting academic integration with academic resources. Poziwilko (1997) echoes this sentiment when she remarks that students often come to writing centers looking to discuss personal experiences, motivations, and academic struggles. She notes that students typically leave writing centers having laid fertile grounds for future conversations. She continues that identity-related issues can be at the core of writing center conversations and that these can enable further conversations, especially when their writing is improving and they feel further encouragement to seek help.

Lastly, and perhaps most related to one's LOC orientation, is the code "belief in performance being predicated on mutable variables." Responses were coded for this when students indicated that the Writing Center bettered their understanding that their own writing performance is the result of variables that they have the power to change—things like their effort, planning, or skill. Although the retention literature is more limited in its connections to this LOC variable, what exists currently points strongly to a connection with retention (Drago et al., 2018). Furthermore, this code offers one of the clearest indicators of a student's LOC orientation, as self-belief to effect change makes for the most direct impression of one's LOC orientation.

What follows is a detailed exploration of the quantitative findings of these codes as they emerge in the collected data. As in Chapters 4 & 5, representative (but not exhaustive) qualitative examples are used from both the interview and reflection data. Although none of the reflection questions asked explicitly about students' LOC orientations, much of the data were

coded for one of the three LOC variables. This seems to strengthen the notion carried throughout this study that the three retention factors are interrelated and that their reliable emergence in this data indicates their strong connection to writing centers. The example responses given for each of the three codes are not representative of a particular reflection question (as the satisfaction or preparedness responses were), but, instead, are representative of all responses coded for those three codes across all reflection questions. In other words, an example coded for “self-identification” is presented as representative of all “self-identification” responses, regardless of the reflection question it originated from.

### *6.1 Quantitative Analysis of Locus of Control*

When asked to respond to the statement that “Because of my Writing Center visit I feel more in control of my writing performance” (Survey item 12.3), 11 students responded “somewhat agree” (42.3%), and 8 responded “strongly agree” (30.8%). Only one student responded “somewhat disagree” (3.9%), one “strongly disagree” (3.9%), and the remaining five responded “neither agree nor disagree” (19.2%) with the. Although generalizing from this small sample size is impossible, it’s clear that, for this small population, students are tending more toward a strong internal LOC orientation because of writing center help. Furthermore, results from survey item 10 support and contextualize these findings, for when asked if they feel capable of addressing and overcoming a difficult task/problem in their writing the responses were as follows: 6 responded with “strongly agree” (23.1%), 14 responded “somewhat agree” (53.9%), 4 responded “neither agree nor disagree” (15.4%), 2 responded “somewhat disagree” (7.7%), and none responded “strongly disagree.” The important point here is that the surveyed students feel relatively capable of addressing difficult tasks themselves (according to Q10) and that some of those feelings of capability are attributable to their visits to the Writing Center (according to

Q12.3). Additionally, when asked in survey item 6 how often they seek help through the Writing Center when they encounter a difficult task/problem in their writing, 9 responded “Always” (34.6%), 10 responded “Most of the time” (38.5%), 4 responded “About half the time” (15.4%), And the remaining 3 responded “Sometimes” (11.5%). Not only do the surveyed students feel mostly capable of addressing problems personally, but they attribute some of those feelings to the Writing Center, and they visit the Writing Center to help address those problems at relatively high rates. Again, if students have positive experiences with academic faculty and academic assistance, then they are more likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005).

Recall Hayley’s interview responses discussed in chapter 5.3 in which she notes of her Writing Center visits:

I definitely feel like they gave me the tools to do it on my own so I don’t have to come to seek someone else’s aid as much, but I definitely feel like a lot of the stuff I needed beforehand I can do now on my own.

If students are having such positive and personally accountable experiences with the Writing Center as Hayley does, then the frequent rates at which they appear to be visiting the Writing Center are a good sign that the Writing Center is being used in the manner intended. It means students are seeking to increase their capacity to complete tasks on their own, not abuse assistance in order to achieve a passing grade. This approach to the Writing Center, and all academic help, is important to student retention because it encapsulates a crucial element of what is meant by Tinto’s (1975) and Pascarella’ & Tarenzini’ (2005) notion of a positive interaction with academic staff. It is also important in understanding the manner in which writing centers can and should productively encourage internal LOC orientations. Despite writing centers being



an external force on students' academics (anything beyond their own self-directed learning is, of course), they maintain their academic integrity by strengthening students' internal LOC orientations.

The following sections explore the three codes mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. This will do much to elucidate how students are interacting with the Writing Center in a positive and personally accountable manner and how that indicates and increases their internal LOC orientation.

### *6.2 Qualitative Analysis of Locus of Control: Self-identification*

As mentioned above, self-identification is crucial to students' ability to form a productive internal LOC orientation. The data from this study strongly suggest that students' ability to self-identify aspects of their writing and themselves as learners increases because of help received in the Writing Center. This is helpful to confirm, given that the express pedagogical aim of writing centers is to encourage self-awareness such that students can self-critique and edit. The following table offers representative coded responses taken from multiple reflection questions, each labeled in the left column next to the respondent number.

As respondent 1 is asked to comment on her satisfaction with her performance across the semester, we see her attributing the increased ease and lessening stress of her writing course to taking ENGL 103. Her continued observations suggest that she is now a more self-aware student, saying "Now, I know what I'm capable of..." This observation seems to indicate a stronger internal LOC orientation, as she follows with acknowledgment of her own control over her writing outcomes: "and I know if I start the assignment right away I will get a good grade." This observation echoes the assertion of Drago et al. (2018) that students with stronger internal LOC orientations are less likely to procrastinate. Indeed, this student's phrasing suggest she has

*Table 11: Locus of Control through Self-Identification*

Respondent	Coded Responses
<p>1. Reflection 3 Q1: Describe your satisfaction with your own performance as a writer this semester. How satisfied and/or dissatisfied do you feel with your writing?</p>	<p>I feel great in my writing performance this year. <b>I'm really glad I joined ENG 103 because it has made English easier and less stressful. Now, I know what I'm capable of and I know if I start the assignment right away I will get a good grade.</b></p>
<p>2. Reflection 1 Q2 : 840488: How prepared did you feel for completing your most recent paper successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do the next time you write a paper?</p>	<p>I felt properly prepared, <b>I got some tutor help which helped my understanding. As a writer I learned I can write very well if I put enough thought into it. The next time I write a paper I want to remember to get the help needed.</b></p>

Table 11 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses
3. Reflection 3 Q2: What did you learn about yourself as a writer this semester?	This semester, I learned that I am a big procrastinator. I also learned that when I write my first draft, I tend to add a lot of unnecessary information and run-on sentences. <b>It was very helpful for me to go to the Writing Center and see how much improvement I am able to make. I also learned that I perform better when I have check-in points and get early feedback on my work.</b>
4. Reflection 2 Q1: Describe your satisfaction with your own performance as a writer at this point in the semester. How satisfied and/or dissatisfied do you currently feel with your writing?	I would not say that I am satisfied but I have definitely grown as a writer in many different ways. <b>Both the writing center and my English 101 course have challenged my writing and helped me discover the flaws in how I write and think.</b>

internalized control to the extent that the only obstacles she perceives between her and success are her own procrastination, stress, and lack of personal awareness.

Respondent 2 begins a trend of students connecting their increased self-identification to planning future help. Like the first student, respondent 2 senses a stronger internal LOC orientation being built through ENGL 103, saying that he can do well if he “put[s] enough thought into it.” That this sense of internal control over his writing’s outcome does not preclude receiving help is no small connection. Working with a tutor, he remarks, “helped my understanding,” and he is able to see receiving that help as just as necessary and natural a step in the process as inputting an adequate amount of thought. This positive and personally accountable engagement with the Writing Center is best elucidated in an interview response from Allison. She answers interview Q5, regarding how she would gauge her confidence now versus at the beginning of the semester and to what she owes and change, by signaling growth in her self-awareness and in her use of the Writing Center:

I would say that I am more confident in my writing and everything. I’m more comfortable and aware of like revisions I need to make before asking. Like sometimes I have an idea like “maybe there’s something I can change with that,” but I don’t go ahead and do it because I want professional input. So I’ve become more aware of myself in my writing and everything. It’s kind of gone from being dependent to just double checking.

When asked in a follow-up what she attributes such growth to, Allison responds:

I think it’s just a combination of things. You hear all the time college is a team sport, so you know. It kind of just takes everybody to just build your success, so I think it’s just everything but also me growing as a student and a writer. Just using my resources, I think

because you know there's only so much those resources can do you know so at some point it is up to the student to—

This observation that her learning/improvement is the product of a fruitful relationship between personal accountability and academic help is a crucial development that seems to occur simultaneously for many students as they visit the Writing Center. Regarding retention, it is reasonable to say that students like respondent 2 and Allison have, through the Writing Center improved self-identification to such an extent that it now promotes other retention factors such academic integration with faculty/staff, self-efficacy, and, of course, academic performance. For Allison, this comes through when she notes such things “I would say that I am more confident in my writing,” or when she indicates her success is attributable to “Just using my resources, I think because you know there's only so much those resource can do.” For respondent 2, the promotion of those other retention factors, namely self-efficacy, come out when she begins by noting “I felt properly prepared, I got some tutor help which helped my understanding.”

Respondent 3 continues this trend of integrating Writing Center help into his process, but with the added distinction that the Writing Center served as a metric for his personal improvement: “It was very helpful for me to go to the Writing Center and see how much improvement I am able to make.” For respondent 3, the Writing Center serves as crucial feedback that allows further internalization of what he's capable of, who he is as a writer. So not only does he recognize the benefit of receiving help in improving his performance, “I also learned that I perform better when I have check-in points and get early feedback on my work,” but he also sees the interpretive power of that help, it's ability to read him and allow him to read himself, so to speak. That he calls his visits “check-in points” suggests he sees his progress existing mostly in his control and that that progress is best interpreted and the internalized via

Writing Center tutoring. The pedagogical goal is that he becomes a student on the verge of needing such check-ins less and less. This process is echoed, again by interviewee Allison. When asked if she could describe any change in her attitude toward writing from the beginning of the semester to the end (Q5.1), she answered:

Whew, wanted to die when I first came in and found out that the class was only about writing, but that changed when I realized I can do this and I'm not the same writer. So I've definitely changed that attitude or perspective because obviously I can't change it, so you know I have to go with it and see how it is. So it was nice going through it and seeing like "oh I'm not the same writer that I came in as." I see it as not as big of a mountain as I would before.

After feeling herself change as a writer and her attitude toward writing shift from one of dread to one of acceptance, she remarks in a follow-up about what prompted such change:

No I mean like I said before, really just seeing that I was getting those same comments less and less, that I was improving and not just doing something without learning helped me change my attitude. And like I said getting positive feedback from the same tutor really helped me track my own progress and not feel so bad about writing so much.

Thus, the parallels between Allison's and respondent 3's comments strongly suggest that both students engage with the Writing Center in such a way that promotes increased awareness, identification of problems as well improvements. It is the power of tutoring conversations to it make known to students where they stand and how they are progressing. This strengthens their internal LOC orientation by improving their ability to self-identify and rely less on the help of the Writing Center for larger, more formative critiques. For Allison, even those conversations

that simply show that their writerly mistakes are occurring “less and less” are confirmation of the control she is exercising on her work through revision.

Lastly, respondent 4’s reflection prompts him to acknowledge the role the Writing Center is playing in his self-identification, in his reinvention as a writer. As mentioned in the opening to this chapter, the process of self-identification leading to personal adaptation/change is a necessary indication of a strong internal LOC orientation. Fittingly, respondent 4 selects the word “challenged” to describe his process of adaptation and change. Having “definitely grown as a writer,” he sees the crucible in which that growth was fostered being the Writing Center along with ENGL 101. For him, in ENGL 103 and 101, he underwent a challenge to his writing but an act of discovery as a writer and thinker, saying the courses “helped me discover the flaws in how I write and think.” Adding more context to this process of self-identification, Allison, in her response to what she takes away from her Writing Center experiences (interview Q6), describes self-identification as the primary takeaway. However, she sees a telling application of it in the classroom when asked to describe what she means by her identification takeaway:

Things in my own writing or things in other people’s writing because you know in class we still have to do like peer edits and stuff. So I definitely think that helps because there is like a major difference between something I’ll write and something someone else will write. Because sometimes I feel like the students that aren’t in 103 or probably don’t go to my professor’s office hours have a more generic writing or something I would have written in the beginning, but like I can see the difference. Now I kind of know what comments to make in my peer editing that I’ve gotten here or that I used to do or whatever.

Self-identification through the Writing Center extends a clarity to writing beyond one's own work. Allison has taken her own writerly improvements and fashioned herself a better reader. She implies, then, a visible internal LOC orientation onto others and makes herself a more aware and successful reader because of it.

Self-identification is an indicator of one's LOC orientation, and these students' engagement and improvement in it are found repeatedly found in their responses. The next code "willingness/ability to seek help" will build the connection between LOC orientation and their visits to the Writing Center by demonstrating how their increased willingness and ability to seek help because of working with tutors in ENGL 103 is a marker of strong internal LOC orientation.

### *6.3 Qualitative Analysis of Locus of Control: Willingness/Ability to seek help*

Table 12 offers representative coded responses taken from multiple reflection questions, each labeled in the left column next to the respondent number.

One aim of supplemental academic assistance is to increase students' internal LOC orientation such that they appropriately engage with that assistance. Respondent 1 exhibits such an appropriate engagement, as he distinguishes proper attribution of his preparedness and success: "I felt very prepared to successfully write my first paper. I say this not because they are the reason I wrote a good paper, I say this because I made an effort to ask for help when I didn't know what to do." When pinpointing the success of the act of simply asking for help, he cites his internal LOC orientation and notes his triumph over his pride. Furthermore, this success at asking for help bleeds into his approach to his professor, with respondent 1 noting that he wishes to maximize the benefit of his professor's feedback by not forgetting necessary parts that shouldn't require his professor's attention. Students' increased ability to seek help is perhaps one of the most key takeaways from their Writing Center experiences, at least pertaining to retention.



Table 12: *Locus of Control through Willingness/Ability to seek help*

Respondent	Coded Responses
<p>1. Reflection 1 Q2: How prepared did you feel for completing your most recent paper successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do the next time you write a paper?</p>	<p>After coming to the Writing Center and meeting with John and Joe [both pseudonyms], as well as working with my professor one on one, I felt very prepared to successfully write my first paper. <b>I say this not because they are the reason I wrote a good paper, I say this because I made an effort to ask for help when I didn't know what to do.</b> Instead of sitting around confused and upset, I didn't let my pride get the best of me and I asked for help. Next time I write a paper, I will remember how much asking for guidance helped me. I will also remember to look at my rubric and not forget important parts of the paper (like works cited, title, etc.) so when I turn in my draft, my professor doesn't have to comment on that.</p>

Table 12 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses
2. Reflection 3 Q3: Looking back on the entire semester, what did you struggle with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? And, what helped you most to address these challenges (including things you did)?	Time management and dedication to studying out of class were issues for me as a first year student; <b>the writing center has helped me greatly improve upon these qualities and I plan to take the 104 section of the course in order to instill these good habits further.</b>
3. Reflection 3 Q3: Looking back on the entire semester, what did you struggle with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? And, what helped you most to address these challenges (including things you did)?	I struggled the most with time management and learning how to ask for help. I learned, however, that making a schedule and planning out assignments helps me to better manage my time. <b>I also learned that going to places like the Writing Center and my professor's office hours encourages me to get the help I need.</b>

As has been noted, positive experiences with academic faculty and staff correlate with increased retention rates, as do successful interactions with academic assistance. Beyond reaching out for help, students must also be equipped to reach out skillfully, responsibly, and successfully.

Interviewee Emma recognizes such ability being improved through her Writing Center visits when she remarks on her Writing Center takeaways (Interview Q6):

I think my takeaway would be seeking help. But I need to like prepare myself, like when I go in I need know that I just need help with this, this, and this. And that's what I did every single time I came to the WC, so like recently I went to the Center for Career Development and I went in there and was like this is what I want to do, and I need help with this, this, and this. And I didn't really do that before coming to the WC.

Thus, in the process of recognizing the benefit of seeking help from the Writing Center, these students are also learning how to seek help elsewhere. Moreover, respondent 3 shows that students also feel more encouraged to get help when they reach out initially. This chain of seeking help that originates in the Writing Center is significant for two reasons: first, these students enrolled in 103 are required to meet with tutors at least 4 times a semester, meaning that many students' reticence or inability to seek help can be drastically ameliorated through structured and well-motivated academic assistance as is done in 103. Second, as Poziwilko (1997) notes, many students come to the Writing Center for reasons besides writing help before any other place on campus because it seems a low-stakes environment without the pressure that other forms of staff/faculty outreach pose—that is, they can discuss themselves as learners without setting up a meeting with an academic counselor, an advisor, or even a professor. This means Writing Centers often make for students' first substantive interactions with university personnel and very often make for their first wave of feedback when encountering many

problems beyond writing. That these interactions are preparing students to further engage with the university elsewhere says much for the retention-promoting power of the Writing Center—for its power to help students become aware of themselves, help them accept and participate in seeking assistance, and certainly help them effect change in their university careers through their own agency.

For some students, exercising that agency comes in the form of strictly seeking writing help, as it does for Allison as seen in her description of her process for writing her most recent paper (interview Q7):

That was a lot of groundwork and just going back and forth to my prof and developing my own thinking and then going to class because even class like helps you understand sometimes. So I just had to wait it out a little bit and keep going over further and further into the topic, and then eventually I was like okay I have a pretty good idea and that was when I went to Avery [pseudonym]. And that helped a lot because I already had “this thing” and he was like “hey ‘this thing’ is good so just do this and it’ll be even better.” Once I did that I went back and he said “okay now you can do this thing and it’ll make it even better.” So this paper was definitely a lot of using my resources.

Preparing herself and then choosing to exhaust her resources is an active and internally LOC-oriented way of achieving academic integration on campus—academic integration being that important element of Tinto’s (1992) longitudinal model that considers students’ engagement with outside-the-classroom academic resources and experiences like office hours, research opportunities, and tutoring. But still, for other students, exercising agency means using that internal LOC orientation strengthened in the Writing Center beyond ENGL 103, as when Jade notes her takeaways from the Writing Center (interview Q6):

So one of the things that I really looked for in a college was that they had a lot of opportunities for tutoring and help, so I definitely grew to love that someone is always going to help me, someone is always going to give me writing help for any class, so that I don't just have to figure everything out by myself. So I guess, it's that help is there, and I should be using it. And I really picked that up by being here and feel like I'll keep it going in my other classes.

Students knowing that they can and should be seeking help is invaluable in their efforts to persist. Growing to love the feeling of help being available, as Jade does, goes far in extending their initial commitment to the university which is a crucial factor in their retention decisions (Tinto, 1975; Habley, 2012). If, through the writing center, students can develop the same enthusiasm and commitment as respondent 2 when she notes “the writing center has helped me greatly improve upon these qualities and I plan to take the 104 section of the course in order to instill these good habits further,” then it is reasonable to say writing centers, and especially structured supplemental writing center instruction, can be considered as effective at increasing retention as learning communities (Tinto, 2012) as well as other forms of supplemental instruction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

#### *6.4 Qualitative Analysis of Locus of Control: Belief in performance being predicated on mutable variables*

Coding for students' belief in their performance being predicated on mutable variables (shorthand subsequently as “belief”) revealed an overwhelmingly saturated data set regarding two key trends: first, students recognized that ENGL 103 was helping ameliorate their time management issues by providing structured work/tutoring time; second, students were able to conceive of their writing outcomes being directly influenced by how much time they spent

planning, writing, working with tutors, and revising. Because of this, Table 13 offers representative coded responses taken from multiple reflection questions, each question being labeled in the left column next to the respondent number.

For respondent 1, lack of productivity and feeling unable to study and prepare plague his student life as seeming immutable variables: “I tend to set aside time for studying and doing homework, but I never actually do much or even anything. I also don't think I really know how to study and how to feel truly prepared for class.” But for him, the power of ENGL 103 is that it isolates his procrastination and lack of productivity, making those variables feel changeable and correctable (see bolded response). Under the responsibility of coming to the Writing Center and showing his work, he feels himself being made “accountable” not only to his writing but also to himself as a learner. For he continues by observing his need to extend this productivity and accountability to other areas of his student life: “I know I will need to get with groups to study for some other classes and I have those in the works right now. I also need to meet with my academic advisor....” This student indicates the WC is the beginning of his addressing of procrastination. From there, though, the student is isolating further habits he'll need to groom in order to overcome the coasting he enjoyed in high school. Not only does this signal the positive orientation toward academic assistance discussed in the previous section, but it also implies that respondent 1 locates accountability and control in himself; he merely recognizes the Writing Center as helping him enact and sustain that accountability.

Respondent 2 displays a similar internal LOC orientation towards time management when she remarks: “Going to the writing center two or three times a week has helped me with my time management because I have to actually sit down and do my work.” This type of response arose consistently, as students seemed to respond positively to ENGL 103 being a place

Table 13: Locus of Control through Willingness/Ability to seek help

Respondent	Coded Responses
<p>1. Reflection 1 Q3: At this point in the semester, what are you struggling with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? What has most helped you address these challenges; and, what do you need to do to address them?</p>	<p>I tend to set aside time for studying and doing homework, but I never actually do much or even anything. I also don't think I really know how to study and how to feel truly prepared for class. In high school I kind of floated by and I know that here, at UT, that will not cut it. <b>Coming to the writing center had definitely helped in both situations for my English class. Because I am required to come to the writing center, I cannot bail on getting work done. I am also required to show the stuff I have worked on whenever I check out of the writing center, which helps keep me accountable because I don't want to look like I haven't done anything and face not getting credit for the time spent.</b> I know I will need to get with groups to study for some other classes and I have those in the works right now. I also need to meet with my academic advisor...</p>

Table 13 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses
<p>2. Reflection 2 Q3: Thinking about the second major paper you wrote this semester: How prepared did you feel for completing it successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do differently when you write your next paper?</p>	<p>I am struggling when it comes to starting a paper. I get very frustrated and freeze not knowing how to start a paper. I definitely need to work on my time management skills .</p> <p><b>Going to the writing center two or three times a week has helped me with my time management because have to actually sit down and do my work.</b></p>
<p>3. Reflection 1 Q2: How prepared did you feel for completing your most recent paper successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do the next time you write a paper?</p>	<p><b>I took advantage of time spent in this class and tutor meetings and received an A on my first paper. I learned that if i allocate enough time towards an assignment i can create a near perfect paper.</b> I would like to provide myself with more study, revision time on the next one.</p>



Table 13 Continued

Respondent	Coded Responses
<p>4. Reflection 1 Q3: At this point in the semester, what are you struggling with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? What has most helped you address these challenges; and, what do you need to do to address them?</p>	<p>I felt very unprepared for my first paper because I was having a hard time grasping the vital concept..., <b>but once I spoke with a tutor a few times the writing process was much easier.</b> I learned that I don't pick up things as quickly as I would like, but with time and talking things through, I can understand the whole assignment and do a fair job....I need to ask for help like I did before.</p>

of responsibility and consequence, not just one that requires solely internal motivation. This trend is highly significant to the retention conversation being broached in this study because the data studied have the added distinction of coming from ENGL 103 students, not students who sought the help of tutor on a whim or without the support of the course. In other words, the added requirement that 103 students spend an hour per week in the Writing Center has much to recommend to the attempted bridging of writing centers and retention. are required to work in the Writing Center for at least one hour per week,. However, the structured curriculum of ENGL 103 represents an important point of inquiry for writing center researchers interested in the variety of methods that students can interact with writing centers. Importantly, Tinto (2012) calls for a return to the all-important persistence factor of the classroom experience, and the strong link between ENGL 103 and ENGL 101 has much to recommend it. Students treat 103 as an extension of their 101 course, lending it the same gravitas as 101. Furthermore, they engage 103

and Writing Center tutors with a beneficial internal locus of control in that they use 103 to isolate aspects of themselves that need improvement (primarily time management and lack of study skills and productivity).

This isolating act becomes quite actionable for many students, like respondents 3 & 4 for example. Rather clearly and soberly, respondent 3 moves from noting he “took advantage of time spent in this class and tutor meetings and received an A” to detailing just how pliable and controllable the contributing variables to success are: “I learned that if I allocate enough time towards an assignment I can create a near perfect paper. I would like to provide myself with more study, revision time on the next one.” There is strong linkage in his mind between a good grade and the study and revision time spent in the Writing Center. That he sees the Writing Center as the site through which the variable of time management (that variable which he believes holds singular import in his performance) becomes isolated and improved is significant. That students see their work in the Writing Center as helping them work through those variables that contribute to success and not be oppressed by them is significant. This is the case even more so because many of these variables that contribute to their success can be worked through in the Writing Center. Respondent 4, for example, isolates comprehension as the variable detrimental to her performance, but, again, recognizes work/tutoring conducted in the Writing Center as a mechanism through which that variable is worked through: “I felt very unprepared for my first paper because I was having a hard time grasping the vital concept in class at first, but once I spoke with a tutor a few times the writing process was much easier.” And, as with respondent 3, identification of the problem goes hand in hand with not only using the writing center to address it and being more willing to use the Writing Center: “I learned that I don't pick up things as quickly as I would like, but with time and talking things through, I can understand the whole

assignment and do a fair job. Next time I write a paper I need to ask for help like I did before.”

And again, this enthusiasm for seeking help would not signal such a strong internal LOC orientation if students could not distinguish the benefits of working on a particular success variable from overreliance on the Writing Center’s help. Interviewee Hayley’s answer to whether or not she feels any change in confidence and what she attributes that change to (interview Q5) does much to concretize this distinction:

I just enjoyed coming and talking to a tutor about what I was doing because I always felt even more comfortable with the work I was producing, and they always gave very constructive responses. I don’t feel like they were just telling me what to do, they were making me think and they were sort of taking the answer out of me that I couldn’t do myself.

Students’ critical distance between what the tutors can give them and what they must internalize and set about working on is crucial for having a healthy internal LOC orientation. To use the Writing Center as a place where particular variables to their success—whether they be approaches to and understanding of specific writing tasks or softer skills like time management and study habits—are isolated and worked through is what we want our students to do if our goal is to aid in their persistence.

Ultimately, students’ responses like those of respondent 1 *do show* that ENGL 103 and conversations with tutors enact a process of strengthening an internal LOC orientation. First, because students self-identify problems and success in their writing and in themselves as learners; second, because students then become more willing/capable to seek help in addressing what they’ve self-identified; and third, because students learn to engage with aspects of themselves as learners as though they are pliable and often use the Writing Center to do so. If the

data discussed in this chapter have illustrated anything, it's that students' attainment of an internal LOC orientation is a complex process. But insofar as it is a process, the Writing Center and ENGL 103 allow for its attainment and its sustained enactment because they are sites of dialogue and structured work that breed self-discovery, then a willingness/ability to address issues, and finally a space through which those issues are constantly reified and improved.

## 7. Conclusion

In this study, I investigated the connections between retention-promoting dispositions/experiences (satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control) and first-year students' work conducted in the Writing Center as a part of ENGL 103. As its own course, ENGL 103 is a supplemental, one-credit hour course that has students meet with tutors, log one hour of weekly work conducted in the Writing Center, and complete reflections intended to solidify learning and self-awareness. With a surplus of qualitative data and the non-representative quantitative data now analyzed, my return to the original research questions results in a synthesis of the total findings and some moderately confident answers. As with any writing research, reliability and certainty is difficult to attain. That is especially the case here, though, given the limitations explored briefly below. Therefore, the answers to the initial research questions are given with moderate confidence inasmuch as they are generalizable to other contexts but with greater confidence inasmuch as they represent the perceptions of UTK students.

1. What experiences do students who visit a writing center identify as conducive to their success?

From the qualitative data, ENGL 103's first-year students believe the Writing Center aids their success in several recurring ways. The first is by helping make them more aware students and writers. The second is by aiding in the increase of their confidence, skill, and preparedness to complete writing tasks. The third is by helping improve their ability to engage with academic resources (such as tutoring services or professor's office hours) while also making them more willing to seek those academic resources. The fourth is by aiding in an increase to their satisfaction with themselves as learners and as writers, which has strong correlations with their confidence, skill, and commitment to their education at UTK. The fifth is by helping give

students increased feelings of control over their academic performance. And ENGL 103's final aid to students' success that they consistently identify, and perhaps the most important to retention, is their feeling that their academic performance itself improves not only by working directly with a written assignment with tutors, but by becoming more confident, aware, satisfied, and accountable students. The experience of talking to tutors along with having designated working time was consistently indicated as being a contributor to multiple facets of their success. And, as mentioned, throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the data collected through the reflections were a representative sample of all ENGL 103 students.

2. How do students perceive their dispositions, experiences or habits of mind, namely self-efficacy, satisfaction, and locus of control changing as a result of their writing center experiences?

Consistently, students perceived the above dispositions increasing for the better as a direct result of their Writing Center experiences. Quantitatively, through both the survey and the frequency analyses of satisfaction and preparedness, we can claim that these key dispositions increased steadily throughout the semester (see Figure 1 and Table 7). Qualitatively, through both the reflections and interviews, we can claim that all three dispositions and their various manifestations/subcategories improved. Where there are gaps in our confidence because of inadequate sampling via the surveys, there is partial compensation from the reflections and interviews. Furthermore, descriptive statistical analysis and bivariate correlation analysis of surveys mirrored qualitative findings that the dispositions were interrelated and that they were increasing in these students because of their Writing Center visits. Descriptive statistical analysis of the frequency coding for satisfaction and preparedness paralleled qualitative findings which indicated that students were growing more satisfied and prepared as the semester progressed.

One important distinction in answering this question, however, arises from the word “How” in “How do students perceive their dispositions...changing as a result of their writing center experiences?” And that distinction is that, with relative consistency, these students’ perceptions of their dispositions changing were the result of strong internal LOC orientations which themselves were promoted by their Writing Center experiences. In other words, students were not gifted any improvements to their learning dispositions by simply visiting the Writing Center but instead earned them through active participation and effort to create opportunities for their promotion and improvement. Students mostly perceived their dispositions changing as the result of their own active and personally accountable engagement with the Writing Center. Students mostly felt that they earned, through responsible and positive interaction with tutors, any changes in their confidence, skill, or personal satisfaction.

3. What relevant connections can be made between what is known in the retention literature and what is discovered in this study, such that writing center scholarship can now articulate its space in the retention conversation?

Finally, there are several connections between this study and the retention literature that can be tentatively made. First, the retention-promoting dispositions satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control are all fostered and improved through students’ writing center visits. Retention research often uses academic performance as the cornerstone from which it inquires into things such as learning dispositions for their affects on retention (Drago et al., 2018) This is primarily the case with satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control. But it is worth noting (as done in the following connection) that other connections to known retention factors such as academic and social integration can be made from satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control as well. Second, students’ Writing Center visits are experiences with non-professorial academic

faculty/staff that lead to increases in positivity and success. This is known to be a retention-promoting experience—a form of social and academic integration with one’s institution (Tinto, 1975). Third, students cite their academic performance increasing as a direct result of using the Writing Center, oftentimes because the Writing Center fosters the improvement of some valuable skill or disposition such as self-efficacy or time management. Increase in academic performance has been confirmed in writing center research (Sandlon, 1980; Sutton & Arnold, 1974), but its direct connection to student retention is worthy of more mention given academic performance’s primacy to students’ decisions to persist to graduation. Fifth, as Simpson (1991) predicted in one of the early attempts to bridge writing center scholarship with the retention literature, Writing Centers operate as important sites for first-year students to learn to navigate themselves as learners and to navigate the rest of the university. Students frequently noted increased understanding of themselves, their professors, and other university systems such as career centers and other tutoring services because of their work with Writing Center tutors. The importance of students being able to understand themselves and their university environment such that they can interact with it echoes Bartholomae’s (1986) notion that students must continually “invent the university” when they sit down to write, lest their product not meet the expectations and traditions that accompany their institution. In this way, the Writing Center helped familiarize first-year students, who are often in the midst of reinventing themselves as learners, with what is useful and not useful to their transition to college.

These connections have implications for writing centers and retention research. Understanding that the work conducted within writing centers influences student retention is useful as administrators seek evidence that confirms the benefits of their practice. As mentioned above, retention is a metric of value to colleges. The understanding that writing centers influence



retention also increases the impetus behind the creation and support of such formats as UTK's ENGL 103 course. Writing center administrators could now possibly look to expand their methods in order to further promote improvements to retention-related factors such as satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Furthermore, writing centers may find increased justification for pedagogical practices (such as those that promote internal LOC orientations, for example) or a need to revise practices so as to aim for better self-efficacy or internal LOC orientation, while also revising or implementing more robust internal forms of assessment. For retention, these findings are further proof of the interrelatedness of the aforementioned retention factors. And they represent an exploration of the intersection between a unique type of academic assistance in ENGL 103 and student retention. If, as Tinto (2012) asserts, the classroom should become cornerstone of retention research, then such courses as ENGL 103 represent fruitful fusions between academic assistance and classrooms.

### *7.1 Study Limitations*

The research presented contains several limitations. These limitations are primarily its scope, the nature of ENGL 103 being a bit more structured than what might be studied in other writing center scholarship, and that the collected data originated solely from first-year students. Findings claimed and discussed here must be tempered with the understanding that the data collected originated from first-year students in a supplemental FYC course who attend a large R1 university and have not been tracked longitudinally for their retention rates. Survey data are not representative of the entire ENGL 103 population, and the entire ENGL 103 study population is not representative of all UTK's Writing Center visitors. Further limitations arise from potential response biases created because the reflections are an ENGL 103 assignment and not solely a research data source. And another limitation of this research is the lack of inter-rater reliability in

coding. All research analyzed was conducted by the individual researcher without any official assistance of input from colleagues or outside sources.

### *7.2 Future Research*

There is much left to do after making these connections between Writing Centers and the retention literature. Chief among the tasks is to both broaden and narrow the focus of writing center and retention research. Broadening the focus to include writing center visitors beyond the first year and beyond the experiences acquired in an FYC supplementary course (ENGL 103) would provide more perspective on the claims made as a result of this study. Doing so would allow for writing center experiences to be tested against the larger retention literature that includes knowledge of students beyond the first year as well as knowledge about learning communities from which ENGL 103 might serve as a valuable starting point. Furthermore, there are perhaps retention distinctions to be drawn by broadening the writing center inquiry to more general tutoring practices seen outside of something like an ENGL 103 course. As mentioned previously, it may be the case that findings from this study will not be replicated under more typical tutoring conditions in which students are not participating a writing center course.

Narrowing the focus to investigate what tutoring practices, pedagogical models, or administrative tactics bring about such positive changes in students' dispositions and academic performances would do much to edify writing center best practices and research. To be clear, UTK's Writing Center pedagogy aligns closely with the writing center standard proclaimed in Harris (1995), the one-to-one tutorial practice. That said, future research can provide more direct evidence of increased retention rates correlated with Writing Center visits, while other research may continue the trend began here that investigates elements of the retention literature such that students, professors, writing center and university administrators might better understand the

practice of writing centers and what they can provide. If the success of UTK's ENGL 103 program is any indication, writing centers have much to recommend them to entering and participating in the retention conversation. And it should be the ultimate goal of such conversation to better inform and lead writing centers to better practices, more informed and competent students, and more productive and efficient universities.

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## Appendices

*Appendix A: Survey*

**Introduction.** You are being invited to participate in a survey about the writing experiences of students enrolled in ENGL 103 at UTK. The purpose of this study is to better understand the kinds of experiences our students have had so that we can assess and evaluate our practices and any benefits you see from them.

**Participation.** Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data up to that point will remain part of the study unless you ask for it to be removed.

**Consent.** I have read the above information. I agree to take this survey

Yes, I agree to take this survey

No, I do not agree to take this survey

Q1) I believe that I can complete writing tasks at the level required of me

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree Nor Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

Q2) I believe that I am a capable/good writer

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree Nor Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

Q3) When I do well on a writing assignment, it is because of my (check all that apply):

Time Management

Planning

Writing Process

Use of Resources (e.g. Writing Center, Instructor's office hours, Online Resource, etc.)

Revision

Effort

Skill

Q4) When I do poorly on a writing assignment, it is because I of my (check all that apply):

Time Management

Planning

Writing Process

- Use of Resources (e.g. Writing Center, Instructor's office hours, Online Resource, etc.)
- Revision
- Effort
- Skill

Q5) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I visit my professor during office hours

Never                      Sometimes                      About half the time                      Most of the time                      Always

Q6) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I seek help in the Writing Center

Never                      Sometimes                      About half the time                      Most of the time                      Always

Q7) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I consult a resource such as a style guide, writing or grammar handbook, or an online resource

Never                      Sometimes                      About half the time                      Most of the time                      Always

Q8) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I seek the help of a peer (such as a friend, classmate, roommate)

Never                      Sometimes                      About half the time                      Most of the time                      Always

Q9) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I use my prior writing knowledge or experience to figure out what to do

Never                      Sometimes                      About half the time                      Most of the time                      Always

Q10) When I encounter a difficult task/problem in my writing, I feel capable of addressing and overcoming the problem

Strongly Disagree                      Disagree                      Neither Agree Nor Disagree                      Agree                      Strongly Agree

Q11) I tend to get the paper grades that I deserve

Strongly Disagree                      Disagree                      Neither Agree Nor Disagree                      Agree                      Strongly Agree

Q12) Because of my Writing Center visits I feel:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
More satisfied with my writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More skilled as a writer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More in control of my writing performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better prepared to write my papers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Appendix B: Interview Questions*

The following open-ended questions will be asked of all interview participants. Follow-up questions that arise from a participant's responses may be asked.

Q1) How would you describe your experience as a first-year writer at UT and in ENGL 103?

Q2) Could you tell me about a time in which you felt satisfied with something you wrote?

Q3) Was there a moment during the semester when something clicked for you or when you learned something distinct and new that helped you with your writing? If so, could you tell that story?

Q4) Could you tell me about a time that you struggled in your writing this semester, what the challenge was, and how you overcame it?

Q5) Overall, how would you gauge your confidence in your own abilities as a writer now versus at the beginning of the semester? To what do you owe any change?

Q5.1) The same with your attitude towards writing, do you see it as a meaningful task, something burdensome, or daunting? If any change has occurred during the semester, to what do you attribute the change?

Q6) Could you tell me about some of the things you take away from your experience or work in the Writing Center (e.g. better understanding of preparation, improved grammar, increased willingness to seek help, etc.)

Q7) For your most recent paper, could you tell me about the steps you took to get it ready for submission?

Q8) Finally, what, if anything, would you like to add about your experience in the writing center or more generally as a first-year writer at UT that your responses so far do not explain.



*Appendix C: Reflection Questions*

*Reflection 1:*

Q1) Describe your satisfaction with your own performance as a writer so far. How satisfied and/or dissatisfied do you feel with your writing?

Q2) How prepared did you feel for completing your most recent paper successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do the next time you write a paper?

Q3) At this point in the semester, what are you struggling with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? What has most helped you address these challenges; and, what do you need to do to address them?

*Reflection 2:*

Q1) Describe your satisfaction with your own performance as a writer at this point in the semester. How satisfied and/or dissatisfied do you currently feel with your writing?

Q2) Thinking about the second major paper you wrote this semester: How prepared did you feel for completing it successfully, what did you learn about yourself as a writer by doing it, and what do you want to remember to do differently when you write your next paper?

Q3) You're more than half-way through the semester at this point. What are you struggling with most as a writer, and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? What has most helped you address these challenges; and, what do you need to do to address them?

*Reflection 3:*

Q1) Describe your satisfaction with your own performance as a writer this semester. How satisfied and/or dissatisfied do you feel with your writing?

Q2) What did you learn about yourself as a writer this semester?

Q3) Looking back on the entire semester, what did you struggle with most as a writer and overall with your life as a student (e.g., time management, study habits, etc.)? And, what helped you most to address these challenges (including things you did)?

## **Vita**

Source: Ryan Lee, “Retention and the Writing Center’: A mixed-methods study measuring writing center students’ satisfaction, self-efficacy, and locus of control.” Master’s Thesis in English, The University of Tennessee, August 2019.