

Beth, Matt, & Marilee Part 2

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SPEAKERS

Matt Cox, Grace Pregent, Sharieka Botex, Nicholas Buonanni, Beth Keller, Colton Wansitler, Marilee Brooks-Gillies

C Colton Wansitler 00:00

G Grace Pregent 00:03
Will popcorn through introductions. I'm Grace. I'm the Associate Director and Interim Director of the Writing Center at MSU. Nick.

C Colton Wansitler 00:09
Um, should I start introductions? lightning round? Okay. I'm Colton Wansitler, I am the Interim Assistant Director of the Writing Center at MSU, and we'll go to Grace.

N Nicholas Buonanni 00:31
Hello, my name is Nicholas Buonanni. And I am a graduate coordinator at the Writing Center at MSU.

S Sharieka Botex 00:37
Sharieka Botox, I'm a graduate coordinator and graduate writing consultant at the Writing Center at MSU. And I'll say I'm glad to have you guys here to be doing this. But also, Matt has told, asked me, to call him Matt. So I'm going to do that during this interview in anybody else prefers to be Beth or Dr. Keller just let me know and I'll go by that.

B Beth Keller 01:05
That's fine. Oh, yeah. That was cool. And so then I'll go, I'm Beth. I am a sixth year professor, which is weird right Matt, at Purdue Fort Wayne. I graduated from MSU in 2015. I was a writing center person for a

long time there did various graduate responsibilities, ran Holden Satellite for a couple of years as a master's student, and was also a teacher, TA, when I was there.

M

Matt Cox 01:38

And I'm Matt, and yeah, I'm going into my eighth year here as a professor. I'm an Associate Professor now, and just taking over the first year of a three year stint as the grad director. So we'll see what that's like during a pandemic. But I also too, am an MSU alum and writing center, an MSU Writing Center alum. An interesting bit of trivia, that I always find I want to tell people, is that my first year in the center there was Trixie's first year. We came in together.

B

Beth Keller 02:08

Oh, really?

M

Matt Cox 02:09

Yeah.

G

Grace Pregent 02:10

I didn't know that. That is a nice bit of trivia.

M

Matt Cox 02:12

I didn't either. I came to MSU not knowing she was going to be on faculty and she became my chair, and that was very exciting. I loved the other faculty, but Trixie and I really hit it off and she was just what I needed.

B

Beth Keller 02:24

I will say Bill Hart-Davidson was my chair, but there is something about Trixie, that is very special. She gave a lot of feedback and advice that I didn't get from anybody else on my committee.

M

Matt Cox 02:37

I also love Bill. He was also on my committee.

B

Beth Keller 02:40

We have the same committee just flipped it around.

M Matt Cox 02:43
I think so.

G Grace Pregent 02:45
We completely agree with Trixie, she's special.

M Matt Cox 02:50
She's wonderful.


G Grace Pregent 02:52
Well, great. Well, I am looking at the questions and if we stopped around organizational culture, maybe we will pick up there? So, Sharieka not sure if you would like to ask? Sometimes you facilitate this section, you're welcome to if you'd like to.

S Sharieka Botex 03:07
Sounds good. So I'm glad to hear that you guys had Trixie, and she was great for you because she's my chair, too. So, I feel like I'm in good... I knew I was in good hands, but I've got evidence of that from what you all now. But for the organizational culture, the first question is: What was one key value or practice that has been, or was a constant, at the Writing Center when you worked there?


B Beth Keller 03:36
I think I would say the first word[s] that came to mind is inclusivity and openness. There was no one who ever came into the center that didn't, that wasn't welcomed. As far as I know. There was a sort of, like a, I don't know sounds kind of hokey maybe to say, but like a warmth an inviting place. I've experienced it at some other writing centers, but not quite in the same way that I felt that it existed at the MSU Writing Center. I don't know if that's the right word, its that like when I was talking during our last interview about how it didn't even matter if I wasn't working on assistantship in the center, I always found myself going back to the Writing Center. Like it became the center for me. And I think part of it might be my own personal experiences of finding out about the field of rhetoric and composition, was through writing center theory, first and foremost. So I think for me, that's where there was just this, I don't know this pull that everything felt okay and safe, I guess in the center.


M Matt Cox 04:44
Something that felt really foundational for me was that Trixie, both as a writing center studies person or writing center person and also as a queer rhetorician, like queer rhetorics person, um, was really good about putting into practice what the sort of disrupting of boundaries between professional and personal look like and what it looks like to disrupt the boundaries between work and play. And so I was always really


impressed and amazed with Trixie sibility to haul out the markers or whatever it was we were going to do, you know, and then like, just kind of really actually do it. Like I think a lot of us are good theorists and like we're good at like, abstractly hypothesizing for fun, what it might look like to break down barriers between things, but Trixie was really good at like just doing it and then that spilled over into the center and how the center operated and I remember at first just like I had come out of like working as a technical writer in software, right? Like I come out of this very like nine to five corporate world and all of a sudden I was like, "okay, really like in my in the third grade classroom, like, what are we doing?" I very quickly, like got over that and saw it as really generative, and I just leaned into it. I still carry that like desire to disrupt those boundaries.


 **Marilee Brooks-Gillies** 06:07
Sorry, I'm late guys.


 **Matt Cox** 06:09
Hi Marilee.

 **Beth Keller** 06:09
It's so funny, because I everyone starts waving and not everyone's on my screen and I'm like...

 **Matt Cox** 06:13
That made me go to The Brady Bunch mode, I changed over to Brady Bunch mode.

 **Grace Pregent** 06:18
I like Brady Bunch mode.

 **Beth Keller** 06:20
How do I do that?

 **Grace Pregent** 06:20
Everyone goest to Brady Bunch mode.

 **Beth Keller** 06:21
Oh there [haha]

G Grace Pregent 06:22
How are you doing?

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 06:28
Good? I don't anticipate how long meetings are so, you know... time is a construct like time has no meaning right now [haha] No for real, it's worse than ever, it was a research meeting about power dynamics in the Writing Center, we are writing an article about listening across framework. It's very exciting, but we hadn't met for a while so there's just, you know, a lot.

G Grace Pregent 06:53
I understand that. I've had to set alarms to remind me, "Grace this you only have 10 minutes left and then you have the next thing, you know?" It's It's funny cuz we're not changing... I'm not changing locations, I normally just in the same place, but everyone in front of me has changed, right? You have to kind of context shift.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 07:07
Like I'm moving to a different Zoom room, right? Like WebEx, or like, Teams, or Google or... [haha] Yeah.

M Matt Cox 07:15
Yeah.

G Grace Pregent 07:17
A different kind of commute these days... It is a different kind of commute. Well, I, as you know, I wasn't here for the first part of this interview, I have listened to it and I've listened to parts of it. And I heard it was a lot of fun. Those were the words that were used to describe. It was a good time, I think was what I was told. So I'm very happy to be here for the second half. And we had just jumped in with Matt and Beth who I hadn't met before, so very nice to meet them. And we had jumped in under organizational culture and the first question there and not to put you on the spot, as soon as you come Marilee, but I'm trying to respect everybody's time as we go along. So do we... I guess do we want to ask Marilee the same question that Beth and Matt were just...

S Sharieka Botex 07:59
Yeah. I can definitely do that. And hi and welcome, it's good to see you for a second time this summer. The first one we did was: What was one key value or practice that has been, or was, constant at the center?

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 08:12

Oh, I want to hear everybody else's answers, but I'll have to watch the recording later, or see your published research about this. Um, a constant value, I guess, was listening to one another, and caring about each other. You know, like, we didn't have to care about each other in like a deep way, although that's nice, but like, you know, we just, we're there for each other. You know? I think that was a pretty consistent part of the culture. I don't think we've ever like said out loud to folks like that? But it just, it seemed like a thing you picked up by being around one another. And I'm not sure if it was, like, consistent with every single person, but I think the general vibe for the whole center wasâ€”there was like an ethic of care, both in terms of how we worked with writers and how we worked with each other. I usually talk a lot, so I'm trying not to...

S

Sharieka Botex 09:06

I think you're nicely segwaying into question two, and Matt and Beth probably started to do some of that already. So for question two, we have: How would you describe the quality or the spirit of the Writing Center? So you've already kind of answered some of that, but like any, anything that kind of captures it for somebody that wasn't, wasn't an insider, wasn't present that would be able to say, "oh, if I just had to paint this for somebody, what did I see it as?"

M

Matt Cox 09:35

This was already mentioned in the first the first time we met, and it's kind of been alluded to already again here today, especially with what Beth said, which isâ€”it was really, truly a hub and I hope and think that it still is, and that was a really special kind of energy. I still don't see that at a lot of places, schools at all. And sometimes even when the physical brick and mortar space is in place, and even the director, or whoever the leadership is, wants it to be that way, truly building that kind of hub and energy is a lot of work.

B

Beth Keller 10:09

Mm hmm. I agree. I the way I can tell exactly what Matt's talking about is because at the writing center that I'm part of at Purdue Fort Wayne, if that doesn't exist. It's very rule focused and come in to do your job... and not to say that people don't do it well, or that the coordinator of the center doesn't care about students, but it's a weird kind of like, it's almost like practice first, and then we'll talk about theory later, or it's like practice is more important than actually having these moments of bonding and building of that kind of community. I mean, that this just doesn't, it's like, there's not really a book on it. You know? I know a lot of people will try to write those sorts of things, but I don't know it, yeah, I think that that dovetails a little bit on what Matt was saying.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 11:00

Yeah, I get that sense of hub too from, or I did, from MSU. I still think of it that way, like, I haven't been there in a while the last time I was there, it was close for like renovations and I was like, I just, like popped up and like looked in the window and I was like, "Nooo...", you know, but, um, you know, every time I come to visit, it's still like, "what's happening?" I want to like, learn all the things. I think it always was a space like that people would come there between shifts, folks who didn't work there would stop by. I think the physical space helps with that, because there is that like counter and there's like the, I would always call

them the beverages, you know, like when people come in and you'd be like, "would you like a hot beverage?" That's what I would say. And it was a whole joke, because other people don't talk like that. But um, you know, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, whatever, right? Just cold water you could have, you don't have to have a hot beverage, I suppose but whatever. Um, so they're in and they would like grab candy from the candy bowl. You have the pink candy bowl, I hope... and just chat. It was people who were connected to the center people who weren't. You don't have pink candy bowl anymore? I'll send you a photo!

M Matt Cox 12:07

That's so Marilee, I'm like I don't know what color the candy bowl was, there was a candy bowl?

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 12:10

It was a big, like, Tupperware bowl

B Beth Keller 12:15

There were a bunch of people, Marilee, who, and I might have been part of that group of people, who were like, "Why do we always have candy? Why can't we have healthy choices?"

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 12:22

Remember Johnny? Johnny never worked at the center, by the way. He would always be like, "yeah, why aren't there healthier snack options?" and I'm just like, "Dude, it's free snacks... bring your own apples, whatever."

G Grace Pregent 12:29

I'm just saying at ECWCA 2022, if conferences are happening and they will be, then you can come check and see if the pink candy bowl is there. You can...

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 12:44

You don't know? You're not gonna tell me?

G Grace Pregent 12:47

I don't know...

S Sharieka Botex 12:47

We still have candy bowls. I don't know if it's like, I don't know if it's like pink, but we definitely still have plenty of candy bowls.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 12:54

Well, we had like... Oh, yeah, the popcorn machine was purchased while we were there. We also had the button making machine, purchased while we were there, and we'd like to talk about the different punctuation buttons, and we had a lot of ideas about what buttons to make, and the popcorn....

B

Beth Keller 13:10

I still have some of the magnets on my refrigerator.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 13:12

Oh, yeah.

B

Beth Keller 13:13

Made with adjectives. That was so fun.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 13:15

Oh, fun. Yeah, so that was all part of the energy and a lot of people who worked there, like people who had worked there, but you know, maybe didn't work there every semester, would pop in people who didn't but like knew it was a fun place. So people would be like working from the counter or hanging out. Sometimes it'd get a little boisterous, and like it would always have to be Trixie who came out and tell us to be quiet. Like Dianna never did this, which is funny to me, because Dianna more of like, she's more like, seems like that personality that would be like, "hey, cut it out." But, Trixie would always have to be like [gesutre], and she's usually not, she's not like that so it was kind of funny. But she would have to be the one be like, "No, I'm the director, and this is serious and you need to calm down." Because we'd be like having way too much fun and it was disruptive to the sessions that were happening. But usually it wasn't too bad. Um, so yeah, it was just a really positive place, I was a lot of good energy and like, I remember being in a writing group with Matt and Elena Garcia, and we had our writing group meetings, like, at the table in front of the fridge, you know, so it was just like, we're just gonna have it over here during lunchtime. And I remember Trixie is always saying she made a point of trying to eat her lunch out in the center. So it was a time where she wanted people to like come and like, see her if they wanted, like she wanted to be like, part of the center right and be visible, because she knew that some people would be nervous even though she has an open door policy, of coming to her office. Which I'm guilty of, I would come in like hovering the doorway, and just like stand in the doorway for like an hour talking to her, right?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 14:42

I would not go in and sit down [haha] I would just stand in the doorway. Um, so I think she kind of knew that like the way that the weird way the power works then so she would try to you know, she'd have her Coke, because she doesn't drink coffee, but she needs caffeine and, you know, hang out with us at the

table by the fridge. And, yeah, it was just a really happy space in that way. And I'm thinking particularly of the cabinet location, the other locations didn't have the same vibe. Like I actively disliked the Business Communication Center, which I think I mentioned a little bit during the last interview, were like they have a TV screen and like it was always on news channels, and it always turn the volume all the way down, but you couldn't turn off the TV. And it was like a general use space where people kind of like take naps. And like they'd host workshops there from the Lear Center that were disruptive to our sessions, and it was supposed to be our place. It was called The Place, by the way. I don't know if it still is. So I didn't like working there, and there was no windows. Um, so in the winter, it was particularly bad because you'd like be in the dark all day and then like, go outside and it was dark already. And so I didn't like that space. And the Library was also felt kind of bleh. And then I never worked in the other satellites. So.

B

Beth Keller 14:42

I would too.

G

Grace Pregent 15:55

Were you there when the business location and a library open, Marilee?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 16:00

The business location in the library?

G

Grace Pregent 16:02

No the business, um, the business is separate. We can't find when either of those opened. Trixie doesn't know.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 16:08

I think the BCC opened the year before... either the year that Trixie started or the year after. Because she was not the one in charge of negotiating it, and I remember her telling me that. Because she was annoyed with how things worked over there.

M

Matt Cox 16:20

Yeah. It was either, so you came in 2008 and I came in 2007. And in 2007, there was no BCC center. And so I think it started the year you started [Marilee] and because all we really had was the library and the main center and then the La Casa, like there was the Spanish.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 16:36

Oh, Yeah. Oh, and like the athlete one.

M Matt Cox 16:40
Yeah.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 16:40
I can't remember, SASC? Student Athlete Support Center?

M Matt Cox 16:44
Mm hmm.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 16:45
Um, yeah. So BCC started then, that, my first year, but it'd been negotiated by Janet Swenson or Dave Sheridan, I think Janet. And so like Trixie was like, "I would have done all these different things." She didn't, it took a while for her to tell me that, but... I was really grumpy about it, I was one of the coordinators of that space, and that space did not feel as good for lots of reasons. Um, also one of my co workers played Second Life all the time, and was like not really talkative with other people and we were supposed to coordinate the space together and it was awkward, but like everybody else was wonderful, so. Eventually we developed a better relationship too, but it just, I really had a grumpy for semester and then I'd be in the home space and Cavanaugh [Bessey Hall], and I wouldn't know where stuff was. and like Trixie be like, "How do you not know where that is?" And I'd be like, "I'm only in this space for two hours a week." And so then, we created a policy where people would try to have more equitable hours in at least have some more reasonable hours in Cavanaugh [Bessey Hall] because that was like our big connector space. And after that semester, I pretty much tried to work all my hours in Cavanaugh [Bessey Hall], I also worked in the library sometimes, but, I also didn't like the library because it had a much more heavy walk-in culture. So, and people were like really intense and the appointments were shorter. They were like 30 minutes long, and people like followed you to the bathroom. It was stressful.

B Beth Keller 18:04
Yeah.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 18:04
Like, "I need you to look at my paper" and "I'm like, I gotta go."

B Beth Keller 18:06
I think I worked there like once, and I was like "Nope, never again."

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 18:10

Yeah, and I remember Trixie saying too that the library was, like, didn't have as many special resources given to it, and so whenever there was a budget cut in the Writing Center, she'd always just take away stuff from the library. She'd be like, "fewer hours in the Library..." So, I guess we all kind of felt that way about the library. Sorry, I didn't mean for my answer to get so grumpy. But apparently, this is why I started studying space and place, which was the subject of my dissertation was totally focused on how bad I felt in the BCC compared to Cavanaugh [Bessey Hall]. Not Cavanaugh, sorry. That's my current Writing Centers and in a room in a building called Cavanaugh... Bessey Hall.

M

Matt Cox 18:11

Yeah, the Library was rough.

G

Grace Pregent 18:35

I was about to ask, I was like, "I've never heard of Cavanaugh, like tell me where?"

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 18:56

Yeah, they're all merging in my brain now.

G

Grace Pregent 18:58

And Matt, I'm sorry, I don't to interrupt questions, you mentioned La Casa really briefly?

M

Matt Cox 19:03

Oh, yeah, there was a Spanish Language Writing Center Resource, and I don't know the extent to which the foreign language folks actually funded or, um, or promoted and executed that, but I know that for a while it was at least co-promoted with our offerings. So, yeah.

G

Grace Pregent 19:26

Okay, cool. I hadn't hadn't heard of that.

M

Matt Cox 19:28

Yeah, definitely asked Trixie about that. I know that it was jointly done, you know, in a similar way as maybe like the BCC, but it was actually more, I was got the impression it was more actually under the auspices of whatever Spanish Language, folks, whether it was Foreign Language Department, or whatever.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 19:48

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 19:40

I had totally forgotten about that, too. Now, I'm just thinking, did I tell you guys last time about the BCC and the guy in the Lear Center who was really intense about the glass and I had to clean it with cheesecloth? Yeah, like my first shift this guy can't even remember his name right now, like Brad or something. He he didn't he was like involved in the leadership I'm just pretending His name is Brad, I have no idea. Um, like showed me how to, like there was like, there's a wheel of cheesecloth, and I had to like cut it off and then like use Windex on this like glass like countertop. And it was like part of the closing procedure in the space, and he was very serious about it, so, the place had shiny glass surfaces.

G Grace Pregent 20:34

And it is no longer a location.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 20:37

Thank God.

G Grace Pregent 20:39

The library still, but I haven't heard of people following people to the bathroom, so...

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 20:43

That's good. Well, also the Lear Center space felt weird, because there's a bunch of people they're like interviewing for internships, so they're always like wearing suits. And at the center, we're always trying to like flatten hierarchies and like, be like, look more like our students. And so I would be like wearing jeans and t-shirt and running shoes, and then there's like these people in suits. And then they wanted us to wear name tags in that location, and that was a whole thing. So it just it felt definitely like a different vibe. And I think Trixie knew that, and felt frustrated because she was in charge, and like, we couldn't have as much control over, like, how we enacted our, like, culture there. So I'm glad that things have changed. Oh, yeah. And then they also have like rules about well, only business students are supposed to use this location. And but if you do a walk in and you're not a business student, you can, but we weren't very busy. So anyway, problems.

G Grace Pregent 21:37

Mm hmm.

S Sharieka Botex 21:40

Well, I'm glad to hear about the good, the good things that were maintained and the positive vibes that you guys mentioned. I'm glad that the mess you had to clean up Marilee is no longer. I haven't experienced that and that... the business thing we've kind of moved. We don't have that and not to my recollection, is like now, so glad to hear about the spirit, that good spirit and stuff. That's definitely still there and the positive vibes and energy in the snack. So I was out with the destructive and problematic,

and always in the process to make it better, because we cannot do that work. So, we have now question number three I think about describing the center's approach to hiring and/or onboarding and training. So like whatever information, you know of those processes based on your experiences.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 22:33

Did we all have fellowships, all three of us?

B

Beth Keller 22:35

[mm-mm]

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 22:35

[mm-mm]

B

Beth Keller 22:40

I started as a master's student at MSU, so I was there for six years, Masters and PhD, and I got into MSU with no guarantee of funding. And so my first semester there... my second semester I ended up getting a teaching assistantship. But my first semester there, because I had had extensive experience as an undergraduate in writing centers, umm... I'm just trying to think, like how did I? It was sort of one of those things where, like I had just graduated from undergrad in 2009, and I think it was some time... right. Yes, it was. Oh my gosh. Oh, it's all coming back to me. It was something that I had blocked not the interviewing process. I had never been to East Lansing

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 23:25

Oh, you got lost, didn't you?

B

Beth Keller 23:26

I did. I got lost, and I had to park in a parking garage...

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 23:29

Yeah, I Remember this now.

B

Beth Keller 23:30

...off campus? Because you probably would have been there Marilee.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 23:34

I was working in the summer. I remember meeting you, like, that day.

B

Beth Keller 23:37

Yes! And not only did I get lost and all turned around, because you know when you're not a student and parking was, probably still is next to a...

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 23:46

It's a massive campus, and you know.

B

Beth Keller 23:48

I parked, like, off campus in the gerbil cave. Do they still call it that? The multicolored parking garage, and then had to walk to try to find... an I went to a small like campus. Like very tiny, Purdue Fort Wayne is not very big, and I got there. I was so shook up because I was like, "Oh my god, I'm gonna miss this interview." And really it was so laid back. She just wanted to, like meet me, and we, I don't remember the conversation all because it was like, yeah, we'll give you as many hours as we can, like, you know... welcome to grad school and I was like, "Oh my God, this sucks. What am I doing here?" Because of the parking, not because of anything else. And then do you remember what happened? Where we were at? Pretty sure I would have told you guys when I moved. My keys got locked in my car. So I'm supposed to head back to Fort Wayne and I had to call AAA to get my keys. It was a whole big thing. And I was like, "I can't do this. What is it?" Thank God I have a very sane mother who's like "this has nothing to do with anything."

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 24:52

[Haha] It's a sign.

B

Beth Keller 24:53

Parking is not related to the school. She's like, " You'll be fine."

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 24:59

I had kind of a traumatic time. I had already, um, so this is not about the center, but it's connected, right? So I came on a, what do they call it? The, like they have, like recruitment for prospective PhD students and I had gone before for the MA program and then chosen a different MA program because they couldn't guarantee me funding. So I went somewhere where I could get funding at Central Michigan. So I was living in Mount Pleasant, and I came down for recruitment. And that was fine. And I like showed-off all my writing center knowledge because I worked at the CMU Writing Center. And then Ellena and I were given, the um, or earned, or whatever, the fellowships, and I don't think we did the interview because we had kind of

done this like pseudo interview during that visit, where I told you before, I was like that Trixie didn't like me. Um, and then. So then a few months later, it was like, it was April 16th. I remember this because on the way down to I was supposed to go check out the BCC and meet Brad or whatever his name is, and Trixie to talk about my commitment as a co-coordinator of the space. And I'm driving there and around St. John's my mom calls me and says, "my grandfather died." And so I just start like sobbing. And then I have to find the Brode Building and park, like very similar Beth, and then um, I'm like finding a bathroom so I can wash my face. And then like I don't tell Trixie because I don't know her, and it feels weird. So I'm just like, hoping that it isn't obvious. I've just been sobbing my car, and I was like, totally distracted. And just like nodding along, and not at all talkative, which is not me as you guys have learned very quickly. Um, so that was kind of a weird experience. So we both have weird experiences with that, but it had nothing to do with like the actual interview.

B

Beth Keller 26:38

But I think that that I think that's important because what we remember about onboarding, so to speak, right is these external things. There was nothing weird there was nothing strange outside of maybe thinking that you know, Trixie doesn't like you, which we've, I think all had some kind of like, it's just her personality type. Like it's she's a wonderful person. Um, no, like it was the easiest conversation. It was so laid back it was kind of, from what I remember like, this is... this is it? Like I just have to tell you what I know about writing center theory and I have to like answer some questions about how I operate in the group and how...? I think she and Dianna asked, we in my interview Marilee?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 27:25

I might have been I was there that day. I think we chatted before and after.

B

Beth Keller 27:28

Because there was... I think there was a question that asked like how I write, like how I organize my writing or something along those lines, because I vaguely remember talking a lot about my highlighter obsession and whatever. So, I think that like I was saying in the beginning I think that really says a lot that you know, I don't know about Matt, but I don't really remember the interview so much is that our experiences and our practical like we'd been consultants or we understand what it's like to do Want to help people and to be teachers in that capacity and we met the requirements like grades and all that sort of stuff... So...

M

Matt Cox 28:10

I also always kind of felt like Trixie was really good at, um... your time being a construct, right? I just always felt like she was really good at saying like, Okay, come into the space exist here for a while. Let's figure out like what your strengths and weaknesses are, and where you fit best, and you'll kind of naturally be drawn to some stuff, and then other stuff I might suggest to you. I just didn't feel like there was this urgent flailing or panicking about let's immediately figure out where everyone goes, right? And that rubbed off on me too, because I'm a sort of a patient person generally, but like Trixie is a really patient person. And yeah, I mean, there are things that I already think I'm [cough-covering word] that Trixie does even better and I love that. Because then that just makes her more my mentor. But like, Trixie is really good about not immediately commenting about things, like which some people mistake I think as judgment, but I really do honestly think she's good at sitting with things for a while and so I just always felt like,

B

Beth Keller 29:13

We were all like that.

M

Matt Cox 29:14

Yeah, it was a it was the set of moving pieces to be a part of a team in The Center, but it was a set of really slowly moving pieces. You know? And that was okay. Right? I don't know.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 29:26

Yeah. And it's so interesting to think about things like now and I direct the center and like, she had me write my own job description and it was such a stressful experience for me, even though she you know, it was like this really smart thing, right? To be like, okay, so like, here's generally what we think this job is, but like, you're doing it. What is it to you and like...? Having a say and how that was shaped. And then I took on the Graduate Writing Group, so kind of how does that work and like having a lot of autonomy and how that worked and like definitely talking to her and Dianna about it, but not, like not feeling surveilled and not feeling like, um, put in any sort of place, you know? Like, just, like, you know what you're doing, you're good at it, if there's problems, they're going to be problems, we'll figure it out, you know. And kind of speaking to that patience and kind of recognizing that this is a space of learning, not just for writers who come in, but for us, too. And we're trying stuff on, and we're playing with it, and like, let's see how it goes. And not like we're going to throw things out that are here and work, but like we can build from them. We can, you know, you know, reshape things on, as we go. So that always, I think was really positive and productive. And being kind of like onboarded to different pieces of the work. I think something is also different for all of us as we were grad students. So we weren't like recruited in the same way as undergrads who took the 395 class. And at that time, it was pretty much like, I don't know, like maybe half and half grad students and undergrads and I know more recently, there's been a lot fewer undergrads. So but that's changing... I've heard? And so that's interesting to think about. I know I taught the class toward the end of my time there, and there were probably like 10 or 12 students, the class. It was always pretty small, but it was taught each semester. [knocking] Sorry, that's my daughter knocking on her door. Um, she's two she's supposed to be napping. She can open it. I don't know what's going on there. She likes to draw attention to herself... Don't know where she gets that. And, um, so, so yeah, um, a little bit different process for the undergrads. It'll be interesting later to learn more about that how they feel about that process too

S

Sharieka Botex 31:33

So Marilee when you were teaching the 395 course like what was some of your experience or things that you got you kind of focused on or honed in on because of the type of center you were, you were in or because of the type of room you'd had to teach?

B

Beth Keller 31:46

I loved teaching the class and I actually teach it pretty similarly now. Like every once in a while, I think I'm gonna change it and then I, I mean I do, but not in any like deep way. I might have to do more this year

because of the you know, the pandemic um, but, it was a lot of like, Who are you in relation to you're on writing and who are you in relation to like other writers? And like sussing through that for pretty much a whole semester, but... I'm had them write a collage essay early on to kind of disrupt notions of genre and expectations of academic writing. And that was really fun. And then they had to collaboratively make workshops. Because it was also not just like a good project, because we'd have workshops in The Center, but also like, you work with our people, you work with each other, and you kind of work things out and you engage in secondary research and maybe even primary research to make stuff. Um, and then consulting philosophies, people wrote those and then we remixed those, which was really fun. So, um, people would write a traditionally composed teaching philosophy type thing, and if they were teachers, they could choose to write an actual, like regular teaching philosophy, or they could focus more on consulting in particular, but then they had to make something that was a material or just non-alphabetic as a primary format, version, that kind of highlighted the main value that they were talking about in their philosophy. So there's some really cool projects that came from that. And it was also nice for people to kind of see like writing and making is broad and I think that the culture of not just the writing center but of WRAC really supported that because remix was already part of like the first year writing experience and the notion of like, composition and rhetoric and making, being kind of like, writing and making are synonymous things, and writing just one type of making. Really made that I think easier to do just in that culture and with students to, which a lot of them were PW students. So that's been a harder sell sometimes the other campuses where they're like, "what do you mean... that this is like, the writing's just a type of making? What are you talking about?" You know, so I felt like a things in the program lent themselves, like The Center and the program worked well together in that way. Matt, did you teach the course?

M

Matt Cox 33:57

I did. Yeah. You know, it's interesting because I was pretty sure at the time I taught it, that I probably wouldn't get hired into writing center work, but also loved writing center work. So I mean, I was kind of like in this weird position of being sort of here for the class and not here for the club. I mean, like, I just, I knew I was gonna have fun with it, right? But also, there were different stakes for me going in to it. Um, what, but what I really remember is how much those students went on and did amazing things. They're way cooler than me, now, like that, that group of like 15 students that I had in 395, and then like, we made podcasts, and it was so fun. Those are my two big take aways from that class, like, but I loved it. Like it was great opportunity.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 34:41

I realize how much older I was for my students at that time, like all of a sudden, because when I first started grad school as an MA student, I was like, 24. And then by the time I finished my PhD, I was in my 30s. And, um, I got an iPhone. I was kind of a late adopter. And I remember one of my students like wanting to teach me how to use emojis and it's like, "No, I know how to do that." But it was just like funny, right? That they are like, oh, let me show you. No, it's like, oh, no, it's happening. I'm old.

M

Matt Cox 35:10

That's so funny.

S

Sharieka Botex 35:15

At the time that you all were there, were there intentional efforts in place to recruit staff across disciplines? If so, what were some of the efforts and how successful were they?

M

Matt Cox 35:29

I remember more of an effort to have healthy robust WAC with programs and work with faculty across campus in different disciplines and then to sort of maybe like, um, you know, I want to say the word disseminate, but it sounds gross, so I don't, but like, you know, just sort of like spread out through the different faculty and other areas and fields across campus that they, they could recruit students, right? So that that's my... and whether that got more sophisticated or more targeted after I was there. I don't know. But that's also because I worked with Trixie a lot on WAC and with stuff at the time.

B

Beth Keller 36:05

I know too when we started to write and adopt the writing or the Navigating the Master's Degree, so, taking a lot from the Navigating, the PhD, the PhD workshop, that it was kind of twofold. Largely, of course, number one priority was to help master students, particularly people who were, you know, weekend or evening kinds of students, but then also thinking to like this could lead to other people coming to work in The Center. So again, kind of using a tool in a couple of different ways.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 36:44

Yeah, Do you remember like trying to recruit people who came to visit us, right? Like, "You know how it works. You're a strong writer. You have all these great ways of thinking and talking about writing, like, have you ever thought about working here?" And kind of being asked to think about that on occasion by Trixie and Dianna? I do obviously, I agree with Matt too, like the WAC/WID approach with staff and faculty, I think is really important. Because if people have a better understanding of the center, they're more likely to recruit people to work with us. And you already have contacts and other departments to be like, "Hey, do you have any students you'd like to recommend to the center? Don't forget to tell your students about this opportunity!" I also remember doing a lot of like resource fairs, especially in the summer for transfer students. And it was just like a general, you know, resource fair about The Center was, you know, just a table and we would talk about The Center. But a lot of people, especially transfer students and their parents, they'd always be like, "Can I work here?" You know, so there'll be a lot of interest that way

B

Beth Keller 36:59

Was that AOP? Or is that just a term?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 36:59

That sounds familiar? Yeah, I think it was.

B

Beth Keller 37:41

That was the orientation program. I remember being at that table...

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 37:44
Yeah, yeah. That one all the time in the summer.

M Matt Cox 37:46
Yep.

B Beth Keller 37:47
When when you'd have all the incoming first year students who would be there. Yes.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 37:52
Yeah. They're like every week there was like another orientation with another group of students

B Beth Keller 37:57
You reminded me of all these parents who were like, "Can my kid work here?" For sure.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 38:01
It was always the parents that wanted their kids to work in the writing center. Um, yeah. Or like students being like, I'm really good at writing. You know, it was fun. But it was also like we had all these supplies we had to take to the event and they were in the cabinet in the stairwell, although sometimes they were in the basement. I've never actually been to the Writing Center space in the basement where there's like storage. So I'm surprised I've never been there and kind of sad, I should have made that happen. But then we had to take

G Grace Pregent 38:27
For the conference remind me and we can go to the basement.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 38:31
I need to see also these these offices that have been totally remodeled since I was there. Like Trixie was saying, "We bought furniture for your old office, and it's like, way better." I was like, "Yeah, because when I was there, there was like paint in it." Like supplies slash room for a desk. Not that I was complaining, because the other option was that big office were like 10 people share it right next to the ring center, like 310 or something, I can't remember what it's called.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 38:35

Grace, I love all your "when you come to the conference promises," I feel like you got a lot of promises lined up now. So... [haha]

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 39:02

Yeah, it's happening, we have to do it.

S

Sharieka Botex 39:06

I think I think you both, that Matt and Marilee definitely answered the questions already about the design and implementation of the undergraduate course some, is, was speaking about WRAC 395. I do know we had, I'm going to shift over to Nick's questions now, but we had one question about the Navigating the PhD and masters workshops, and if you knew the dates, that those were started, and if this was already answered, and I didn't hear it, forgive me, but did you all start those workshops, Beth and Marilee?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 39:35

Ann Lawrence started the navigating to PhD workshop, and she's kind of a complicated figure and all of this. She was working with Janet Swenson on that before Trixie was the Director. And then when she left this she didn't really work for the center as consultant but at the time I was there. You guys might remember her she was like tall and she always wore purple scarves. Ann Lawrence?

B

Beth Keller 39:56

Oh, Ann Lawrence! Oh, where is she?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 39:58

No idea. Didn't she... She transferred, she was in a different grad program. I think she transferred into rhet/com, or rhetoric and writing, but I can't remember now

M

Matt Cox 40:06

She was, um, she was super grumpy, wasn't she? Like, like, because she came up to me one day and she was like, "Why are you always in such a good mood?" And I was just like, "I mean, I'm not I just figure I'm here to actually be nice. Like, it's part of my job, right?" Like, I was just like, "Who are you?" Like... [haha]

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 40:23

She was the lit. student and she always wanted to take things, tear things apart. So she'd been in class and she was like, "Why is this author fetishizing blah, blah, blah.?" And that was kind of her thing, but...



Matt Cox 40:31

She thought she was Daria, but she was like not as entertaining and Daria...



Marilee Brooks-Gillies 40:35

Yeah. So, not that I need to just be critical of Ann Lawrence, but so she like made these materials but didn't want to share them with anybody after she was giving it up. So, and Trixie was like, well, she made those and was paid by the Writing Center. So those materials belong to the Writing Center was the whole thing. So, eventually....



Beth Keller 40:51

It was a [unclear] grant though, correct? It was an MSF grant, I believe.



Marilee Brooks-Gillies 40:55

I don't even remember for sure. But they were...



Beth Keller 40:58

I believe they received from funding from the MSF to, to start it. Because there was some sort of, I feel like a guaranteed buy-in from some science students who really, really, really needed help navigating their PhD programs.



Matt Cox 41:15

That sounds familiar.



Marilee Brooks-Gillies 41:15

And this intertwined with the writing groups. So these things were kind of together. So when I started as the Writing Group Coordinator, I got navigating to PhD as well, and I was supposed to work with Ann, but Ann was really resistance in training me. So I finally got materials from her, not the PowerPoint, she would not give me the PowerPoint. But I got the workbook, and I could modify it. And then I brought an Elena with me and we like modified the whole thing and we changed how, how... because it was like this really massive like two-day workshop, and it was too much. So we made it into two half-day workshops. And then that gave us time after the workshop to kind of troubleshoot and talk with specific like individual people a little bit more, but it was very popular even then we offered it at least twice a semester. It was usually on a Friday-Saturday when we it was two days. I think at one point, we did it for one day, we tried different things. Um, and then it was modified into the Navigating MA as well. Um, but I started doing that in the summer 2009. So Ann had done it previously. And then there was another grant for Graduate Writing Groups that were so we had our own Graduate Writing Groups that are multi-disciplinary, that we hosted.

But then, the rest are disciplinary, specific ones. And I helped train people, like, other PhD students in their disciplines to facilitate those groups. And I can't remember the faculty member name, who's in charge of that, like Judith, something Trixie might remember. And so we're working with her. I was a very similar facilitator training as we did with our own staff to support Graduate Writing Groups. So those things were kind of connected projects. And we often recruited for the writing groups from navigating the PhD.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 41:17

I think Navigating the Master's degree, I was one of the people who spearheaded putting that together and don't remember the... it might have been 2013.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 42:56

It was after I left, that would make sense, because I graduated in 13.

B

Beth Keller 43:05

2014 wouldn't have made sense, because that would have been my job market year. And I'm trying remember Phil Bratta(sp?) helped and I think there were a couple of other people...

B

Beth Keller 43:13

...it was a combined effort for sure because... and we didn't have any funding for it. We were just saw the need for it and said, "Well, why don't we just go ahead and look at what master's degrees across...." I don't remember how we settled on looking at these different disciplines on campus. Probably, I would suspect we looked in the Writing Center list of appointments to see who was you know, studying what and why they came in and it, I don't know if it's still well attended. It was really popular like to the point where we were like, how are we supposed to continue to, like staff this and the Navigating the PhD, because they were both supposed to be done on weekends. Plus football, right? Can't forget football.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 43:14

Alegra.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 43:16

Oh, God. Can't have anything at the same time as football. Yeah...

B

Beth Keller 44:06

I think it was only a day if I remember correctly.



M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 44:10

Yeah, and we did have MA students who would contact us to register for the PhD one, you know, kind of like "I'm just an MA student can I do this?" So, I think that was also part of the impetus to to create something new. Because there were talks about it when I was still there, but we didn't do it at that time. But I remember asking about it later and like Alegra Smith sent me like all the materials... so I have your materials. But they probably changed again.

B

Beth Keller 44:34

I was the person that did like the stuff for it. Like I put all the materials together and well try and organize it. I was probably over that summer. Poorly, might I add, but to the best of my abilities.

N

Nicholas Buonanni 44:51

All right, well, let's move on to our logistical and practical questions now. Um, so the first one on there is when working in the center, how did you work/organize consultations did the clients schedule appointments. If so, how?

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 45:07

We had Writing Center Online, which I believe you still have...

N

Nicholas Buonanni 45:11

mhm

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 45:11

For the most part writers made their own appointments. If they came in and wanted appointment, I think we would ask them to make their own, like walk them over to computer to support, you know, student agency and wanting them to know how things work. So kind of give them a sense of: here's what the white boxes mean [haha]. But yeah, so, that and we had some on reception. So, for a while it was consultants, but then we would sometimes hire like students who weren't consultants who hadn't done the class in hopes of getting them to take the class. But they would work as/at reception first, and then we also had someone from the secretarial pool. Oh, gosh, you guys remember her name?

B

Beth Keller 45:50

Kathy.

M

Marilee Brooks-Gillies 45:50

Kathy!

M Matt Cox 45:52
Kathy, mhm.

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 45:52
Kathy was delightful, but hilarious. She would like be shopping for bras during staff meetings and things like [haha]

M Matt Cox 46:02
Yes, on the Neiman Marcus discount website.

B Beth Keller 46:07
Yes, didn't she buy a lot of things from like, kind of higher end...

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 46:11
... it would be like Nordstroms and stuff. Yeah. But yeah, she'd always have stuff like that like a window open that she'd be like, go navigate between...

M Matt Cox 46:18
Travis Webster and I were laughing the other day again, just in a text message about how she would come over and she really desperately wanted to pronounce any kind of new name that was, seemed foreign to her. And, you know, in our student population at MSU, there are many people coming over from Asian countries. And she would come over to you sitting at your table and say, "Matt," and she would say, and she would like whisper loudly like, try to pronounce the name of the person and it would always be a really, really not good attempt. And you would sort of just like, tried to keep a straight face and say thank you. [haha]

M Marilee Brooks-Gillies 46:58
Yeah, that was deeply awkward. We've been [audio cuts out here]