

Writing Centers in Carceral Conditions

Laura Hardin Marshall
Saint Louis University
laura.hardinmarshall@slu.edu

Overview

- **Synopsis:** Developing partnerships between prison educators and writing centers, with the goal of helping students become more confident writers and members of the academic community
- **Logistics:** Consulting options and/or procedures (contingent on policies educators have to work around and within)
- **Pedagogy:** Strategies for consulting with this specific student population

Logistics

- **Cost:** Budgetary limitations will determine most options (including costs incurred by the student)
- **Distance:** Commute between consultants and correctional facility will determine feasibility of (a)synchronous feedback
- **Technological Access:** Computer and internet access will determine feasibility of synchronicity and/or delivery methods (digital or print)

Logistical Options

Inside WCs

- Training
- Meeting restrictions

Outside WCs

- WC VICs
- Transportation
- Visit frequency

- Technology/
platform
access
- Fees per
access time

Sync.
Onsite

Sync.
Online

Async.
Print

Async.
Digital

Inside WCs

- Training
- Physical restrictions
- Resource restrictions

Outside WCs

- Delivery VICs
- Transportation
- Time delays
- Intake forms

- Technology
access
- Fees
- Intake forms

Arrangements & Stakeholders

- Writing center and prison education program administrators (agreeing on logistics)
- Correctional facility administrators (approval of warden and/or educational programming staff)
- Volunteers for onsite consulting or print delivery (VIC tests, training, paperwork, and access)
- Consultant training (for pre-existing university consultants or training incarcerated students to become consultants)
- Ongoing communication between WC, PEP, and instructors (will WC use be tied to a class or open?)

▶ Pedagogical Concerns & Strategies

- Emphasis on process and higher-order concerns
- Reducing amount of recommendations (isolating revision efforts)
- Increased praise, affirmation of strengths
- Emphasis on identities and anti-racist/inclusive pedagogies
- Transparency with composition terms (glossaries and/or handouts are helpful)

Practical Concerns & Strategies

- Onsite spatial/physical concerns (seating arrangements, environment, etc.)
- Paper and writing utensils (pens, pencils, typewriter, etc.) as finite commodities
- Asynchronous spatial/physical concerns (limited space for margin notations, 'endnote' system, print and handwritten work)
 - Summative feedback (goals or overview)
 - Handouts

▶ Mental & Emotional Considerations

- High stress in sharing work (increased for incarcerated students)
- High stress in responding to student work (consultants are especially attentive to their audience's needs and concerns)
- Increased stresses often led to increased feelings of reward and fulfillment (on both sides)
- Communication and honest discussions are key