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# Bringing the Tutors to the Students: An Investigative Study of WAC Tutoring in Second Language Contexts

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Bringing the Tutors to the Students: An Investigative Study of  
WAC Tutoring in Second Language Contexts

Kendon C. Kurzer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Bringing the Tutors to the Students: An Investigative Study of WAC Tutoring in Second Language Contexts

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The number of English as a second language (ESL) students attending universities in the United States has increased during the 2011-2012 school year (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005), with, for the first time since 2001, more undergraduate international students than graduate students in institutions across the country (Davis, 2012). Given the wide range of backgrounds and English proficiencies represented by this group, their varying needs are frequently not being fully met, particularly in reading and writing, two areas that are often weak in ESL students but linked to academic success (Matsuda, 2004).

Regarding writing, much research has shown that ESL students need feedback on various aspects of writing to improve (Ferris, 2009), ranging from content, to organization, to linguistic features. However, giving feedback on each of these components may not be possible for writing teachers, due to time demands. Alternatively, peer tutors may effectively work with ESL students to help them understand academic writing expectations in the U.S. and meet said expectations.

This investigative study looked at a newly-developed ESL Writing Fellows (WF) program at Brigham Young University, focusing on the perceptions of the various stake holders (students, writing teachers, and Fellows themselves) regarding the success of the ESL WF program. Via pre- and post-program surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, the perceptions of the students were obtained. Via non-structured interviews, the perceptions of the teachers and Fellows themselves were obtained. From these data, themes that looked at the aspects of the program that were successful and that need to be improved were developed and analyzed, primarily from an administrative perspective.

Overall, this study found that ESL students greatly appreciated having the individualized tutoring provided by the ESL WF program. Students valued the feedback given by the tutor on content, organization, and grammatical issues, and found the follow-up conferences with the tutor to be a great asset as the tutors could explain intended meaning. Additionally, tutors felt more comfortable negotiating intended meaning with the Fellow, which may be more effective at helping students develop the needed schema to apply Fellow suggestions to future writing assignments. However, much of the success of the program relies on the individual Fellow, with Fellows who neglect duties or provide feedback that conflicts with that of the teacher creating problems for students. Administrators should hire and train tutors accordingly. Teachers agreed that the Fellows generally were an asset to their classes, and the Fellows themselves appreciated the opportunity to work one-on-one with ESL students, feeling that this program afforded them experience that would make them more employable in the future.

Keywords: TESOL, L2 writing, Writing Across the Curriculum, peer tutoring, Writing Fellows.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background of the Problem

Across the United States, the number of English as a second language (ESL) students attending universities has increased (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005). Open Doors (Davis, 2012) reported an increase in total enrollment of international students for the 2011-2012 school year of six percent, bringing the total number of international students to approximately 765, 000. Interestingly, this same report states that more of these international students are enrolling in undergraduate programs than graduate programs, for the first time since 2001. While many institutions welcome these international students, given the limited financial and faculty resources available to universities, this population's varying needs are frequently not being fully met. For example, academic success is frequently linked to a student's proficiency in reading and writing, two areas that are often weak in ESL students (Matsuda, 2004). Despite showing English proficiency via assessments such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), many students may continue to experience difficulties with English on an academic level, including the proficiency needed to successfully write well-crafted essays.

Language classes held at intensive English programs such as Brigham Young University's English Language Center (ELC) provide an introduction to the discourse levels needed to succeed at university. However, upon "graduation" from such programs and successful matriculation, ESL students may find themselves overwhelmed by the discipline- and content-specific reading and writing assignments they encounter.

However, writing resources are available to students at a university such as BYU. Peer-tutoring programs such as writing centers, teachers and teaching assistants, and even

online resources such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab are readily accessible and include information designed to help students become effective writers. Given proper preparation and exposure, one would think that ESL students could take advantage of those resources, and thus become proficient writers in English independently. While this may be the case for some ESL students, these resources cater primarily to native English speakers, and thus may either be intimidating for ESL students, or may be intimidated by them. In fact, results from preliminary research conducted among international students at BYU during Winter Semester, 2010, suggest that ESL students tend to be intimidated and feel out of place in writing centers (Evans, et al. 2010).

Meeting the specific needs of a varied ESL student population can be challenging for universities. Ferris (2009) raises probing questions about second language (L2) writers and their various classifications and needs, ranging from placement (ESL vs. mainstream courses), classroom considerations (teacher-student and student-student interactions, strategies instruction, and feedback), and assessment (skills and types of assessment). Students typically considered "ESL" come from a wide range of backgrounds—such as early- and late-arrival Generation 1.5—and language proficiencies, and have a broad spectrum of needs. Specifically, Ferris suggests that ESL students, depending on prior educational experiences, likely have encountered one of three possible approaches to instruction:

1. Neglect of lexical or syntactic variation, perhaps because the teacher lacked confidence in approaching the issue, or because the teacher and students focused on avoiding errors (resulting in simple and safe choices). This focus typically will not help students develop the mature writing style desired in advanced students.

2. A more perfunctory instructional method incorporating sentence-combining drills and transition words/phrases, with the aim of encouraging cohesion. This approach likely will encourage students to use varied writing choices, but typically does not result in a complete writing competence. Over-extended transitions and other bizarre sentence structures may result.
3. An overemphasis on dictionary or thesaurus use to encourage lexical diversity without a thorough comprehension of semantic implication of synonyms may result in students using semantically inappropriate synonyms in their texts (Ferris, 2009 p. 112).

Instead of the above approaches, Ferris encourages writing instructors to include general lexical items and syntactic structures for widely ranging academic purposes (referring to Byrd & Bunting, 2008; Conrad, 2008; Coxhead, 2006, and others). Instructors should also help students (1) analyze the process by which lexical and syntactic variation and cohesion are achieved in authentic texts, (2) explain potential problems with merely supplementing one word for a supposed “synonym” in a text in a manner that will be clear to the students, and (3) include instruction and practice paraphrasing and summarizing from already existing academic resources (referring to Folse, 2008; Schuemann, 2008). While all of the above classroom practices would undoubtedly assist students in producing more mature and varied writing, the time demand on writing instructors may be prohibitive, as each student of any class is likely to require individualized feedback.

In addition to the issues presented by Ferris, other prominent L2 writing specialists suggest that specific and individualized feedback is required for L2 writers to improve in the second language and academic climate of English. Composition issues that must be addressed

in the L2 writing classroom include textual ownership (Duranti, 1993; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2011), critical thinking or idea development (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2011; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996), plagiarism (Bowden, 1996; Currie, 2011; Pearson Casanave, 2004), developing the necessary reading skills/strategy mastery to succeed at research (Reid, 2011), peer response (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) and, of course, rhetorical and linguistic feedback (Bitchner & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2009; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2011; Pearson Casanave, 2004). Clearly, writing instructors who work with ESL students have a long list of urgent topics to cover in their classes.

**Peer tutoring programs.** In order to assuage the demands on composition instructors' valuable time, peer tutors can be used to help provide individualized feedback to native and non-native writers. Writing center employees and teaching assistants often work as peer tutors: fellow students who are knowledgeable about strong writing techniques and can teach those techniques to peers. Bruffee (1984) suggests that peer tutoring provides a collaborative learning experience that can contribute to the successful teaching and learning of writing. Soven (2006) further suggests that peer tutoring can be effective for a number of reasons: 1) peer tutors are in the same social and academic situations as the students they tutor, which can lower the affective filter and reduce stress; 2) peer tutors can easily sympathize with the writing problems faced by the students they tutor; 3) peer tutors often are more accessible than professors as they are either working as a paid tutor or are volunteering their time; and 4) peer tutors do not give grades, which can allow the focus in the tutoring session to move to developing good writing habits, instead of writing a good paper.

Many different studies between the 1960s and the 1990s indicate that peer tutoring is a successful method of teaching writing. Abercrombie (1960) found that peer group discussion

was more effective than traditional instruction. Lagana (1972) showed that students who received peer feedback exhibited more rapid advances in organization, critical thinking, and sentence revision than did students whose assignments were read only by professors. Levine (1990) compared writing in tutored and non-tutored classes, and found that the papers written in tutored contexts displayed significantly better writing. And Deming (1986) indicated that effective writing strategies were developed more thoroughly in peer tutoring contexts.

While these studies and theories do not distinguish between native English students and ESL students, it stands to reason that the same would hold true if tutors were trained properly to address L2 writing issues.

Whereas the effectiveness of peer tutoring on writing has been well documented, not all peer tutoring programs are equally effective, particularly when ESL students are the recipients of the tutoring. For writing centers on campuses with a small proportion of ESL students, training all tutors in ESL-specific pedagogical methods may not be feasible if experienced ESL writing faculty or financial resources are not readily available. Writing centers also typically operate on a walk-in basis, meaning that tutors have not read the papers they work with before-hand, but are expected to offer immediate feedback. Often, this results in a 'fix the paper' perspective, as opposed to an effort to create better writers.

**Writing Across the Curriculum tutoring programs.** Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs promote a closer, more discipline-specific approach to tutoring writing (Russell, 2012). Accordingly, students gain assistance in becoming better writers in their particular field. WAC theory supports tutors, who, in addition to being proficient at writing, may also be content experts able to address the writing challenges of a particular discipline (Robinson, Stoller, Costanza-Robinson, & Jones, 2008). Consequently, WAC programs should train tutors in

proper writing and tutoring strategies, and in discipline-specific formatting and prose.

Additionally, tutors who work with ESL students need to present that information in a salient manner to those students (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008). Clearly, WAC-based tutoring programs require a significant investment of financial and training resources that often limit successful university implementation. These programs have encountered significant opposition as a result, much of that from traditional writing centers and English departments (Russell, 2012).

Despite expense and complicated administration, WAC-focused peer tutoring programs such as Writing Fellows (WF) offer some distinct advantages over traditional writing centers. In BYU's Writing Fellows program, tutors typically work directly with a group of approximately ten students in a particular class over the course of an entire semester. This results in a less directive or "telling" emphasis, focusing instead on "showing" (McLeod, 2012). This approach puts more of the responsibility of learning on the part of the student, and encourages more engagement. It also means that tutors work with students multiple times a semester, theoretically changing the focus from improving a particular paper to helping students to progress as writers. Also, as mentioned above, WAC programs provide instruction on discipline-specific writing, rather than the general academic expectations commonly addressed in writing centers. This more narrow focus may benefit students who are participating in discipline-specific classes.

As with tutors in writing centers, Writing Fellows don't frequently work with ESL students. Accordingly, they may be intimidated or unsure of how to properly help these students (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008), which may negatively impact tutoring sessions. Most peer tutors are trained to focus on the global issues involved with a paper such as organization, thesis development, and idea development, while not acting as "editors" (Thonus, 1995).

Although global issues are important, many ESL writers have problems with surface features, and simply have not had sufficient instruction to form correct sentence structures. ESL students are very aware that their English is flawed, and some simple, directive structural comments may be enough to help with these surface issues (David, forthcoming).

Given proper training, peer tutors may effectively help students with both organization and grammar. A WAC peer tutoring program may be an ideal setting for this as such a program provides students with a personal tutor for a semester. Many tutors report that ESL students eagerly accept criticism and work at improving their language. Zamel (2012) shares the story of an instructor who worked with an ESL student who initially seemed incapable of forming a logical essay, but who made significant improvements in his prose over the course of a single semester, based on instructor comments. An ESL-focused WAC tutoring program may be a way of achieving similar results with many of our ESL students on campus.

### **Significance of the Study**

To date, no major research universities provide ESL students with a WAC peer-tutoring program devoted exclusively to their needs, outside of a few with ESL-focused writing centers or labs (Andrade, Evans, & Hartshorn, forthcoming). And none of the programs that do exist follow the patterns established by the Writing Fellows program. Brigham Young University was the first university to implement an ESL Writing Fellows peer-tutoring program, and this study is the first to determine the impact it may have on L2 writers in an American academic setting.

While this ESL Writing Fellows program focused on freshman composition courses instead of the content courses traditionally seen in these programs, this allowed the tutors to work with students early on in their education, and the researcher to use the ESL-sheltered

sections of the freshman composition courses in this study. Such a WAC peer-tutoring program may prove to be efficient at helping prepare ESL students for the rigors of American academic writing. By providing L2 writers of freshman composition courses a personal Writing Fellow tutor, these students may receive the individualized input and practice needed to improve both rhetorical and linguistic mastery, early in their studies.

### **Purposes of the Study**

This study measured the impact of BYU's newly implemented ESL Writing Fellows peer-tutoring program. Specifically, the researcher looked at student perceptions, instructor perceptions, and Writing Fellow tutor perceptions of the program. As this is a completely new application of WAC tutoring in L2 writing, these perceptions were focused on primarily by using a qualitative approach, as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1995). Future qualitative and quantitative studies may provide additional information.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are ESL students' perceptions of an ESL-focused Writing Fellows Program that supports their freshman composition courses?
2. How do the students respond to the tutoring given them by their Writing Fellow?
3. What are the perceptions of writing instructors and ESL Writing Fellows toward the ESL Writing Fellows Program?

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 introduced second language writing and established the need for creating an ESL-focused WAC Writing Fellows program. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical background of WAC and L2 writing by reviewing and analyzing some of the existing research. Chapter 3



provides the detailed methodological approach to the current study aiming to answer the research questions, and describes the types of data collected along with the analysis procedures. Chapter 4 examines and discusses the study results via a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). Chapter 5 discusses the study’s limitations, offers suggestions for future research, and provides some conclusions.

## **Definitions**

*Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)*: This movement, along with Writing in the Disciplines (WID), supports writing instruction along with content instruction in various disciplines. While the two terms are distinct and employ slightly different theories and approaches, for the purposes of this thesis, both are treated the same. *Writing Across the Curriculum*, or *WAC*, is the term generally used.

*Writing Centers*: Writing centers (WC) are areas where students can take papers from any class to receive tutoring. WC tutors are typically undergraduate students who are proficient in writing, and work part time as peer-tutors. Most WCs don’t have ESL specialists or official policies to help ESL students. The term *writing center* will be used to include *writing clinic* and *writing laboratory*. The distinction between the three is administrative, although, historically, clinics worked with individual students and laboratories worked with groups (Moore, 1950).

*Writing Fellows*: Writing Fellows (WF) are paid tutors, commonly undergraduate students, who are assigned to a group of students from a particular class, typically a content class, to help those students with several different assignments across a semester. WFs read, respond to, and conference papers with the students, and are commonly both writing- and content-knowledgeable, if not experts. WFs programs are not nearly as common as writing centers in institutions of higher education across the country.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aims to help bridge the gap between second language writing theories and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) peer-tutoring programs, a gap which has been acknowledged by select writing specialists (LeCourt, 1996; Matsuda, 1998; Matsuda, 1999; Matsuda & Jablonski, 2012; Silva, Leki, & Carson, 1997), who suggest that WAC programs may be useful in meeting the needs of student populations traditionally neglected, such as L2 writers. However, despite these calls for action, few (if any) WAC programs have fully incorporated an ESL component. At the time of this study, the researcher wasn't aware of any research performed on ESL-focused WAC programs.

Accordingly, this research study was designed to investigate the success of such an ESL WAC peer-tutoring program started by the researcher at Brigham Young University (BYU), starting Winter Semester, 2012, with a pilot study using previously-hired WAC tutors, and culminating Fall Semester, 2012, with a study using five sections of an ESL-sheltered freshman composition class. This program used the existing WAC tutoring program infrastructure (Writing Fellows), adapting the model to meet the needs of ESL students at BYU. This chapter will address the relevant L2 writing theories, WAC theories, and peer tutoring approaches to provide the theoretical framework on which the study was based.

### Characteristics of Second Language Writers

Students typically considered “ESL” come from a wide range of backgrounds. University instructors frequently think of “ESL students” as international students, or students coming to postsecondary schools in the United States (Reid, 2011). However, other students may also be either late- or early-arrival Generation 1.5 students, each of whom come from different backgrounds and may have different levels of language proficiency in the various

skill areas (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Because of these varied backgrounds, which contribute to their varied schema, instructors cannot always predict writing proficiencies of students, and thus need to be prepared to work with a wide spectrum of abilities and needs (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

International students typically come to the U.S. to obtain a degree from a U.S. institution of higher education, and then plan on returning to their countries of origin upon degree completion (Reid, 2011). These students often take English as a foreign language classes in high school and/or college or university courses, or possibly on their own. In their formal education, they generally learn English grammar rules, lexical forms and vocabulary, and may have substantial reading skills, while their listening and speaking skills may be less developed due to a lack of communicative experience (Reid, 2011). Compositional writing skills are typically not extensively developed because of a lack of L2 writing instruction. Accordingly, ESL students may be more comfortable with written grammar exercises or using simple, single sentence-level responses to questions (Leki, 1992; Reid, 2011).

Generation 1.5 students are U.S. residents who come to the United States on a permanent basis, often as political refugees (Reid, 2011). Late-arriving Generation 1.5 students are older when they immigrate, and are usually orally and literarily fluent in their native language (L1). They have learned English by being immersed in the culture and absorbing the language from peers and instructors, and thus are typically stronger listeners and speakers than writers or readers (Reid, 2011). Adult immigrants generally choose community colleges to further their education, due to price, open admissions, and small classes including ESL English classes (Ferris, 2009). They may not exhibit particularly advanced fluency of speech, mastery of complex phonemes, or a solid grasp of ESL literacy (Reid, 2011), although

they are usually more receptive to feedback and understand the need to develop stronger reading and writing techniques than their early arrival peers (Ferris, 2009).

While late-arrival Generation 1.5 students have a solid L1 foundation, their children, early-arrival Generation 1.5 students, may not have extensive L1 literacy skills due to limited/interrupted schooling opportunities in their native countries (Reid, 2011). These students typically have gone to high school in the U.S. where they may have had some ESL instruction. Like their parents, they have developed more of an oral tradition in English, as they absorb the language and culture from their peers and teachers. Thus their spoken language may seem fluent, with good speech rates and solid pronunciation, but they may not have a strong mastery of pragmatic rules, especially in written discourse (Reid, 2011). Early-arrival Generation 1.5 students generally do not consider themselves to be ESL as they are technically second-generation immigrants (Ferris, 2009).

### **Characteristics of Second Language Writing**

As stated above, second language writers come from very diverse backgrounds and ranges of writing experience, both in their L1 and L2. Accordingly, it is very difficult to frame sweeping declarations that are true for all matriculated ESL students (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2011); nonetheless, there are some generalizations that writing instructors and tutors should be aware of so they can teach or tutor more effectively. Phonological, syntactic, discourse, pragmatic, and morphological errors may be fossilized by students at all levels (Valdés, 2011), so these generalizations may not apply to each student.

**Contrastive rhetoric.** Starting with what some have called Kaplan's "Doodles Article" (Kaplan, 1966), contrastive rhetoric (CR) looks at structural writing patterns of various cultures so that they can be directly compared. A recent movement has tried to rename this field as

“intercultural rhetoric,” which focuses more on the “social, situational, and genre-specific nature of written texts and on the dynamic and hybrid, rather than static and homogenous, nature of culture” (Kubota, 2010 p. 194; see also Atkinson, 2004 and Connor, 2002, 2004). While the original concept of CR was critiqued for being overly (Hinds, 1983; Kowal, 1998; etc.), much value can still be found in CR because it assumes that L1 transfer may influence L2 writing, causing L2 students to write in non-native manners (Pearson Casanave, 2004).

Via CR, writing instructors now have access to a fairly extensive working knowledge of rhetoric structures across a variety of genres and languages (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Because CR is based on the wide range of different rhetorical patterns seen across cultures, it emphasizes the need for writing instructors to model and explicitly teach the rhetorical structures of English (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Furthermore, Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) believe that a knowledge of the possible schemata and backgrounds that ESL students bring to their classrooms is critical to writing instructors, although these backgrounds may not predetermine all issues manifested in the papers they write (Atkinson, 1999). This notion requires the program or teacher to be responsible for developing and implementing explicit instruction on the wide range of rhetorical structures required in the L2. Providing students with examples of good writing of a particular genre and helping them analyze the various aspects of those papers may help them better understand expectations (Harmer, 2004).

**Additional features of L2 writing.** In addition to organization issues, ESL students often struggle with many other aspects of writing, such as prewriting or identifying an appropriate topic, developing proper arguments or incorporating solid analysis, integrating

sources, word choice (register or tone, hedging, and conjunction use), and, of course, grammar and linguistic features of the L2.

Preparing to write can be a time-consuming process that fluent writers need to prioritize even in their native languages (Harmer, 2004). Harmer goes on to suggest that, if writing teachers are assigning substantial writing assignments, they “have to give [students] opportunities to think” (p. 87), especially for formal writing assignments. Approaches to collecting ideas on a particular topic often are classified into three groups: open, free activities with all possible ideas being considered, a series of systematic questions being asked about the topic, and techniques to help gather and simultaneously organize the ideas, such as tree diagrams and concept maps (as seen in Nation, 2009, referring to Leibman-Klein, 1987). Teachers of ESL writing classes should introduce these prewriting techniques and help students practice them in class.

ESL students, along with many native English speaking students, may also struggle with understanding what arguments or analyses are in various contexts. Despite being a central focus of most traditional English composition courses, analytical writing is discussed very little in context of specifically addressing ESL students’ needs. However, many university-level writing assignments require students to develop an argument that discusses conflicting views of a topic, which requires analysis and a qualifying approach to the paper, both of which must be taught explicitly to ESL students (Bailey, 2011). Of the approaches to teaching argument commonly employed in composition classes, the rhetorical/generative approach may be best as the principles taught are likely easily transferred to many different writing situations (Fahnestock & Secor, 1983).

ESL students may have little or no knowledge of proper source integration techniques, such as summarizing, paraphrasing, and properly quoting sources (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). With these skills, writers support arguments while avoiding plagiarism, both critical skills in American academic writing (Bailey, 2011). Using original ideas and wording is a common issue among ESL students, because they are self-conscious about their mastery of the English language, and thus commonly feel that the original author “says it better” (Shuemann, 2008 p. 20). This situation easily leads to plagiarism issues, particularly as the notion of plagiarism varies greatly by culture (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). These students accordingly need explicit instruction on what constitutes plagiarism and how to properly cite others’ ideas and words.

ESL students also commonly struggle with word choice, such as using proper tone or register. Writing in a particular genre requires the use of specific types of words, which can be extremely difficult for L2 learners to properly master, and thus needs to be explicitly taught (Harmer, 2004). A related language choice issue that is commonly difficult for ESL students is the need to include hedging vocabulary in most academic writing (Hyland, 2008). Hedges are “considered polite because they don’t force our conversational partners into a corner” (p. 71), and vary based on genre or field, such as in the physical/life sciences, or humanities (Hyland, 2008). While many composition scholars feel that hedging weakens writing when used excessively (Lindsay, 1984; Strunk & White, 2000), based on the frequency that hedging appears in both amateur and professionally-published academic writing, proper hedging techniques are necessary to learn. However, a proper balance must be struck. When used properly, hedges allow writers to precisely express intended meaning, “head off challenges to their ideas” (Hyland, 2008 p. 77), and present themselves in a modest and honest light. In an

additional word choice issue, L2 writers typically use more internal conjunctions than do L1 writers (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008).

Finally, one of the most prominent features of L2 writing is linguistic mastery, or grammar. For an extensive view of how L2 writers use various aspects of the English language, see Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008). For the purposes of this review, it should be sufficient to state that the majority of texts designed to help TESOL professionals work with L2 writers, when providing specific information on writing conventions, focus more on grammar than on rhetorical, organizational, or word choice issues outlined above (Harmer, 2004; Nation, 2009; etc.). Formal grammar instruction may have just a slight (or even negative, if it replaces composition instruction) effect on writing improvement, but continues to dominate L2 writing publications (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Hartwell, 1985). That said, ESL students do need instruction in grammar (Matsuda & Cox, 2009), and commonly expect grammar help from teachers and tutors, feeling that this is their weakest area (Bruton, 2009; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010).

**ESL courses versus mainstream composition courses?** While it is clear that ESL students need assistance in improving their L2 writing, the appropriate venue for this assistance at the university level is not always clear. According to the *CCCC Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers* (2009), placing students into writing courses designed for ESL writers is not always simple, because these students often don't identify themselves as "ESL" or think the extra assistance is necessary. Given the varied background of L2 students (international, Generation 1.5, etc.), identifying and bringing these students into ESL courses can be a difficult task (Ferris, 2009). Also, because international students come to university classes at very diverse levels of proficiency, not all students would benefit from ESL courses,



and criteria for placement into or graduation from such courses are generally not standardized or accurate (Valdés, 2009).

While it can be difficult to properly place ESL students or encourage them to take advantage of available ESL-focused courses, the additional L2-focused instruction can be quite helpful. These L2-sheltered composition classes should also satisfy general education requirements (Conference on College Composition & Communication, 2009).

### **Corrective Feedback**

The role of corrective feedback (CF) in improving language proficiency in L2 learners has varied over the years along with the various philosophies guiding teaching methods. Over the last twenty years or so, theory, including the role of CF, has become somewhat more prominent in second language acquisition (SLA) in general (Bitchner & Ferris, 2012). For a more detailed explanation of some of the various perspectives associated with written corrective feedback specifically, see Bitchner and Ferris (2012).

Most L2 writing instructors believe that feedback is necessary to help their students improve their writing. Others, including researchers like Truscott (1996) suggest that CF makes no measurable impact on L2 acquisition, based on theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical arguments. However, this view is not shared by scholars like Ferris and Bitchner (2012), who feel that students cannot improve unless they have specific and clear feedback.

Although feedback is likely needed to improve, the effectiveness of direct and indirect feedback, along with the long term impact of any CF, is not always clear (Bitchner & Ferris, 2012). However, initial results of various studies suggest that CF may lead to improvement in linguistic accuracy of ESL students, although little reliable research exists looking at long term rhetoric mastery (Bitchner & Ferris, 2012). Given the fact that writing classes typically

need to address content, rhetorical structure, and linguistic features, it is no surprise that ESL teachers or composition teachers working with ESL students may feel overwhelmed by the amount of instruction and feedback they are required to give to their students (Bitchner & Ferris, 2012).

### **Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines**

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement, started in the 1970s, has become one of the largest movements with aims to improve writing instruction and writers due to the increased pressures to provide accessible writing instruction (Russell, 2012). In combination with Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which emphasizes writing within a particular field and encourages programs and instructors to include a writing component in content courses (Moore Howard & Jamieson, 1995), WAC has spread to institutions of learning throughout the country, with conservative estimates indicating that tens of thousands of administrators, faculty, and students from hundreds of distinct institutions participating in various aspects of the movement (Russell, 2012). Research indicates that WAC has promoted learning and communication for students in various fields as it has been “successful in improving teaching and learning in the challenging environment of higher education” (Zawacki & Rogers, 2012 p. 1).

WAC programs are defined partly by their objectives: to help students become independent thinkers and problem-solvers and to assist them to develop written communication skills. However, WAC programs are more uniquely defined by their pedagogy: to move university educational systems away from lecture-based modes of teaching (or the information delivery model) to an active student engagement model (Haring-Smith & Stern, 1985; McLeod, 2012). Unlike traditional writing classes that focus on teaching the features

typically expected in academic discourse, WAC programs teach both the content of the discipline as well as the discipline-specific discourse features (Pemberton, 2012).

For all of the success that WAC has seen in the last few decades, the movement has also seen a fair amount of resistance. While faculty of many English departments support WAC approaches to writing across fields and even run WAC programs, some departments see WAC programs as infringing on their domain (Russell, 2012). Ultimately, a number of WAC programs have been cancelled by English faculty who are unsympathetic to the cause, or by a simple change in personnel which results in less supportive faculty (Fulwiler & Young, 1990). WAC has also encountered resistance from composition specialists who criticize the “cookie cutter” approach frequently taken by WAC instructors when teaching discipline-specific conventions (Russell, 2012). Despite this resistance, WAC programs are alive and well, with 64% of institutions reporting either having or planning to begin such a program in 2008, up from 38% in 1987 (Thaiss & Porter, 2010).

Recent WAC scholarship has noted the need to meet the demands of the varied student population in most of the institutions of higher learning across the country. As the number of non-traditional students in classes increases, instructors need to be able to work with these students and meet their individual needs. Accordingly, WAC administrations need to prepare for those students and can

help faculty recognize the variety of needs, language proficiencies, and cultural contributions among linguistically diverse students, and to understand that linguistically diverse students’ notions about academic writing and writing in the disciplines may differ from those of the dominant university culture. (Johns, 2001 p.148)

This instruction provides WAC faculty with the tools needed to work with L2 learners when necessary, as even traditional composition instructors should share the responsibility of working with ESL students along with TESOL professionals (Hall, 2009).

Some studies indicate that traditional composition or writing intensive content course instructors are actively seeking instruction on how to handle the, to put it in their terms, “ESL problem” (Zamel, 2012 p. 246). These experiences of faculty members wanting information on how to work effectively with second language writers resonate with the experiences of this researcher, who has been asked to give several presentations on working with L2 writers at WAC luncheons and clinics. Clearly, faculty more accustomed to working with native English speakers (NES) feel the need to better understand how to help nonnative English speakers (NNES) with writing as well.

Other WAC/L2 scholarship focuses on students’ experiences with writing in various disciplines. Leki (1995) was one of the first to look at case studies of L2 undergraduate writers outside of freshman composition classes. While this was a landmark study, it looked less at how WAC integrates ESL students than how the students themselves coped with writing in various disciplines. In an additional case study, Leki (1999) investigated a student who cut academic corners by turning in the same papers to instructors of different courses, turning in the same homework assignment several times to the same teacher, and using his identity as an ESL student to cut corners on writing assignments or get more time to complete them. Leki suggests that, based on this case study, U.S. higher education isn’t as successful at encouraging critical thinking and writing across the curriculum as it could be. An additional study suggests that NES regularly ignore other ESL students’ comments in peer reviews, perhaps due to the NNES students’ lack of confidence in their own ability to contribute in a

meaningful way to group learning (Leki, 2001). This suggests that NNES may struggle with writing groups and peer review, both of which are common approaches to writing-intensive courses (Cox, 2011). In a different study, Leki (2003) suggests that ESL students consider writing in nursing courses to be a “necessary evil, [or] an obstacle to get beyond” (p. 82), as writing in such courses did not match professional writing expectations. These studies suggest that ESL students struggle in writing-intensive courses, and that WAC could provide more support for L2 writers.

Outside of the work done by Leki outlined above, few L2 studies exist which focus on L2 students in writing-intensive (WI) courses (Cox, 2011). One of these few, by Wolfe-Quintero and Segade (1999), looked at 29 L2 students in WI courses from 16 majors, along with their faculty instructors. This study found that faculty responses tended to focus on sentence-level issues over rhetorical issues, and that faculty generally felt that NNES students needed more ESL education before full matriculation and admittance to WI courses. Zamel (2012) found that, of the 325 surveys completed by L2 students, “the majority of the students’ responses described classrooms that silenced them, that made them feel fearful and inadequate, [and] that limited possibilities for engagement, involvement, [and] inclusion” (p. 251). These studies suggest that faculty members need to do more to help ESL students to feel comfortable in their writing classrooms, and help them understand how they can contribute in valuable and meaningful manners.

WAC scholarship on L2 writing is even more limited, with only five articles found looking at undergraduate L2 writers and programs (Cox, 2011). Of these articles, three were calls to action (Hall, 2009; Johns, 2001; and Matsuda & Jablonski, 2000), one was a case study (Fishman & McCarthy, 2001), and one was an action research project (Zawacki &

Habib, 2010). Fishman and McCarthy (2001) present information on a NNES in a WI class in which the teacher felt limited by the student's lack of proficiency in English, and couldn't understand how he was to bring the student's language abilities up to the level of her peers over the course of a single semester. At the beginning of the semester, the student anticipated an easy "A" from the course, as she had received high marks in freshman composition, but the instructor simply could not comprehend her writing, and could do nothing but recommend that she go to the writing center (a common "solution" that will be addressed later in this review). The instructor eventually passed the student with a "C," but felt that he had lowered his standards to do so (p. 210). Such an interaction likely results in frustration on the part of both the teacher and the student.

In their action research project, Zawacki and Habib (2010) interviewed 26 L2 writers from various disciplines on their experiences with writing in academic settings, along with faculty from 15 different disciplines on their experiences working with L2 students. This study showed that L2 writers commonly experience issues with voice and originality, clear and salient expectations and writing conventions, and general issues with Western academic writing. Some students perceived Western conventions as being liberating, but others felt that they were required to leave out much of their individuality, including culture and personal voice (p. 68). This WAC/ESL professionals collaborative project was one of the first large-scale projects looking at WAC and L2 writing, and resulted in a website devoted to helping WAC professionals work with ESL students, *Valuing Written Accents*.

WAC is a highly visible advocate for writing in many institutions, where professionals want to serve their L2 students better, and L2 undergraduates struggle with writing intensive

courses across the disciplines (Cox, 2011). Accordingly, the fields of WAC and L2 writing could work together more to better meet the needs of an increasingly varied student population.

### **Tutoring**

While writing instructors can obviously impact second language writers' proficiency, properly meeting the wide range of needs of second language writers (including rhetorical and linguistic mastery) requires a significant amount of time and personalized feedback that instructors simply don't have. Alternatively, peer-tutoring may be an effective way to provide ESL students with the individual feedback they require to improve.

In other academic climates (United Kingdom universities, for example), the role of peer tutors is so deeply rooted that justification for the inclusion of peer tutors in sound pedagogical theory is rarely discussed (Harris, 1992). However, in American institutions, where the preferred model of instructions focuses on the "teacher-as-deliverer-of-knowledge" (Harris, 1992 p.155), it becomes necessary to investigate this alternate pedagogy.

Extensive research on peer tutoring began in the 1960s with Sanford (1962) and Newcomb and Wilson (1966) compiling works on the topic by a plethora of instructors in their edited books. However, because peer tutoring's roots "lie in practice, not in theory" (Bruffee, 1984 p. 3), it likely began long before then. Bruffee (1984) noticed that students often refused help, and that the solutions proposed by the institutions—such as mandated or remedial programs—simply weren't working, perhaps due to the perception of such programs as being nothing more than an extension of the typical classroom approach. Instead of this "same old same old" instruction approach, peer tutoring was proposed as a collaborative learning method where students help each other by tapping into the "conversation of mankind" that lies at the root of what sets us apart as humanity (Oakeshott, 1959).

Although peers can help students in a non-threatening manner, quality control of these tutors can be difficult. Frequently, despite instruction to the contrary, tutors can be product focused by making the paper the focus of the tutoring scenario, rather than teaching solid writing practices. While this may meet what the student perceives as his/her “needs” (that of getting a good grade on the assignment), “[w]hen you ‘improve’ a student’s paper, you haven’t been a tutor at all; you’ve been an editor” (Brooks, 1991 p. 1). Instead, many peer tutoring program administrators encourage a minimalist approach, where the students do most of the work. In minimalist tutoring, the tutor is conscious of physical cues that help maintain the student’s ownership such as keeping the student closer to the paper, giving the student the pen or pencil, getting the student to talk as much as possible, and sitting next to each other instead of across the table (Brooks, 1991). All of these physical approaches help keep the paper strictly in the student’s hands.

This “hands off” approach lets students maintain ownership, and thus seems appropriate from a theoretical viewpoint; however, this “pure tutoring,” top-down, writer-centered approach may not always be effective (Shamoon & Burns, 1995 p. 134).

Alternatively, some WAC faculty suggest that “really” learning to write was the result of more directive tutoring sessions, as seen in the type of feedback typically given by thesis and dissertation chairs to their students or in music and art master classes. A more directive approach may in fact be more effective at teaching important writing approaches and strategies (Shamoon & Burns, 1995).

One aspect of directive tutoring that has been commonly criticized is the use of modeling. Modeling warrants a closer look, especially when tutors work in ESL settings. Via modeling, novice writers read and imitate established writing or examples of such writing



characteristics like thesis or topic sentence development, etc. (Shamoon & Burns, 1995). Tutoring practices using modeling have been shown to effectively help struggling students with mastering particular writing features, as long as the tutor is guiding and not making the corrections directly (Harris, 1983).

In addition to looking specifically at the paper at hand, peer tutoring promotes collaborative learning by encouraging students to work with a tutor who can help students acquire and master new skills (Harris, 1992; Hawkins, 1985). As such, tutors act as coaches standing on the sidelines, who use their training and experience to help students practice and to provide valuable feedback. In this scenario, the student does the actual work needed to succeed (Harris, 1980). Additionally, this collaboration helps both students and tutors to “constantly see the world anew,” while using “negotiation and compromise to reach insight and to achieve identification” (DeCiccio, 1989 p. 12). In the role of tutor, peers encourage students to develop insight by giving novice writers the chance to discuss ideas in a judgment-free and supportive atmosphere (Harris, 1992). Typically, students are more open and honest when asking questions of a peer than a teacher, not matter how supportive and encouraging the teacher may be. In peer tutoring, the focus shifts away from the constraints of probing for “what the teacher wants” (Harris, 1992 p. 156), and as the tutor’s feedback can be freely ignored without significant repercussion. A lack of emphasis on grades may result in students focusing more on improving writing skills—process writing—rather than improving the paper at hand—product writing (Hawkins, 1985). Peer tutors may also be effective at helping students become familiar with the particular language conventions of a particular discipline, as they have recently navigated the new environment themselves and thus are likely aware of potential pitfalls (Harris, 1992).

Although peer-tutoring programs likely are helpful at providing students with the personalized feedback necessary to improve, not all such programs are equally effective at accomplishing the goals of helping students to become better writers, rather than helping create a better paper (Haring-Smith, 1992). This portion of the thesis addresses two peer-tutoring approaches: the common writing center and the less-common Writing Fellows program, before investigating existing literature designed to help tutors work with ESL writers.

**Writing centers.** Due to their prominence in higher education institutions across the country, much of the research done on peer tutoring pedagogy, including the vast majority of that illustrated above, was completed via writing centers. Accordingly, this section will focus only on the approach of writing centers to peer tutoring, rather than peer tutoring in general.

Historically, writing centers (WC) were formed by experienced English department faculty members who recognized the need to help students who struggle with writing (Moore, 1950). This remedial approach to instruction has resulted in a fairly high percentage of the attendees being compulsory, with professors requiring their students who struggle to visit WCs for assistance (Moore, 1950). These centers, perhaps stereotypically, were locations

- funded by a single department, English in most cases
- where freshman come to get help
- where the focus is on error
- which is badly staffed
- which is not held in high esteem in the academy
- where “bad” people are sent (even remanded). (Wallace, 1991 p. 83)

Although simplistic, this list of characteristics does illustrate the rudimentary beginnings of WCs. However, this remedial approach has progressed along with WCs as a discipline. By the 1950s, WCs were beginning to be incorporated into writing programs, with 70% of the institutions responding to a survey reporting either having or planning on starting a center (Moore, 1950). By the early 1980s, over one thousand institutions had some kind of WC

(Hawkins & Brooks, 1981), and over 90% of campuses had WCs as of 1996 (Grimm, 1996). Research on writing centers has since developed into its own discipline, resulting in a *Writing Lab Newsletter* established in 1977, *The Writing Center Journal* established in 1980 (Carino, 1995), and the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) established in 1982 (Kinhead, 1996). From humble beginnings, WCs have since become institutionalized across country.

Although few published resources address the specific procedures in the writing center, Soven (2006) does provide some procedures common to WCs. Typically, students meet with WC tutors for a one-on-one (or face-to-face) conference in a location designated as a “Writing Center.” Some students are required to visit the WC; most are not, but seek out the extra help voluntarily. And some students find the WC experience to be valuable and come back regularly, while others simply don’t. Typically, the conferences don’t last longer than 30 minutes or so. WC tutors generally are not familiar with the assignment prompt, or even the writing conventions of the particular discipline (Soven, 2006).

Much research and literature explains the history and theoretical background of writing centers, but still more focuses on the goals of WCs, helping students to become better writers. By some accounts, up to 25% of the students at various institutions voluntarily use the services offered by WCs (Morrison & Tatu, 1985). Studies show that WCs help students foster a sense of accomplishment as they often prefer doing their own work and reaching their own conclusions, which may not always be the case in writing classrooms (Harris, 1995). And, for all the reasons outlined earlier, WC peer tutors may effectively help students navigate the often unfamiliar terrain of academic writing, in a collaborative environment.

Conversely, WCs often are treated as metaphorical “prisons” for students caught committing “linguistic crimes” (Pemberton, 1992 p. 12) or “hospitals” where tutors diagnose

diseased texts and work on “curing” the writer (Purcell, 1998 p. 3). Paper-focused tutoring may not be particularly effective at helping students to truly become better writers, despite the central goal of most WCs to do so. WCs have also been criticized (primarily by WAC practitioners) for assuming that “many aspects of text production (such as tone, awareness of audience, coherence, use of specific detail to support arguments, grammar, etc.) are ‘generic’ in nature and...extend across disciplinary boundaries” (Pemberton, 2012 p. 367). This “one-size-fits-all” approach to writing may work for lower-level writing, but once students become members of a specific discipline they simply must master the discourse of that field. Additionally, WC tutors are rarely trained in any discipline-specific rhetoric other than that of their own discipline, while they are expected to effectively help students from a wide range of fields (Pemberton, 2012).

An additional critique of WCs stemming from a critique of North American academia in general is a lack of cultural diversity along with the tendency of—primarily Caucasian—WC tutors to think that standard American English writing conventions are the only “correct” method of writing (Kilborn, 2008). This bias is not limited to second language writers, but also various, non-standard dialects of English encountered at major universities across the nation. Kilborn (2008) urges WC administrators to adopt an attitude of non-bias by recruiting and maintaining a culturally diverse clientele, by hiring and training minority and international tutors, and by training tutors how to respond appropriately to L2 and dialectal writing (p. 392). Most programs, however, likely would be limited by funding or a lack of experienced and willing faculty members to provide this vital instruction to tutors, and thus such a program would not be entirely successful, at least initially. Additionally, programs would likely be equipped to do little more than perhaps a semesterly training meeting to help their tutors work

with ESL students. Further supporting the fact that this problem is, indeed, a problem, Leki (2009) suggests that many WC tutors may lack confidence in their abilities to successfully help ESL students to improve effectively. Per the *CCCC Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers* (2009), WC administrators should model and train tutors to work with second language writers, as well as hire tutors with the specialized knowledge necessary to effectively work with these students.

**Writing Fellows.** Unlike writing center research, very few publications can be found on the WAC peer-tutoring program, Writing Fellows (WF). The first Writing Fellows program was developed in the early 1980s at Brown University, by Tori Haring-Smith (1992), and evolved as an extension of the writing center. These first Fellows were not content or genre experts, but responded to student writing of an assigned class as “educated lay readers” (p. 179), as, with content expertise, tutors may be likely to focus on the paper, adopting a product focus over the aimed-for process focus (Severino & Traschel, 2008). Thus, “[a]ssigning peer tutors to courses outside their majors became an important part of the Brown credo” (Soven, 2001 p. 209), and was adapted by other WFs programs, at least initially.

As more programs were developed, and the varying needs of students prompted change, some programs started assigning WF tutors to disciplines with which the tutors were familiar, due to an increased confidence in the tutors themselves (Severino & Traschel, 2008) and the rhetoric and content demands of various fields. For example, research on writing centers indicated that non-literature major tutors did not have the schema required to ask appropriate questions to elicit proper rhetorical analyses from tutees (Kiedaish & Dinitz, 1993). However, the extent to which WF programs across the country currently ascribe to the generalist or specialist approach to tutoring is not clear, and requires further research to verify.

Additionally, some programs seem to lie somewhere in the middle. A recent examination of the WF program at the University of Iowa revealed that, of 17 new tutors to the program, 13 considered themselves generalist, while the remaining four adopted a specialist perspective (Severino & Traschel, 2008).

A further variation on the original theme comes in the form of WFs programs like that of Penn State Berks, where WFs work primarily with students in groups, facilitating peer response and encouraging a focus on higher order concerns (Lawfer, 2005). The WFs model has even branched across the Atlantic Ocean, making a small but noteworthy appearance in the United Kingdom higher education system, despite its general lack of inclusion of any significant writing component in UK institutions overall (O'Neill, 2008).

In their roles as WFs, Fellows generally do more than simply work with students on pre-assigned papers. Unlike their writing center peers, they often work directly with instructors, serving as a go-between to help students understand what, exactly, their teachers are expecting from writing assignments (Zawacki, 2008). As such, WFs typically meet with the instructors of a course several times in the attempt to understand writing prompts and expectations, clarify unclear aspects of the assignment, and report back regarding the success of the tutoring conferences. As a result of this interaction with instructors, experienced and confident WFs may help teachers to revise assignments by helping them understand exactly what is confusing their students or offering suggestions on how to revise for clarity (Zawacki, 2008). Also, because WFs are commonly assigned to work with students of a class of an instructor who has requested to have WFs involved, instructors tend to be invested and willing to work with their tutors (Soven, 2006).

When working with students, WFs first receive drafts of the student papers at least a week before the final deadline, read and respond to those drafts, then conference with the students to discuss the comments and drafts (Soven, 2006). This approach is very different from the “drop-in” model of writing centers; WFs have the time they need to properly consider the specifics of a particular paper, and then can contemplate how to help the writer improve. However, this process does require a “time-lag” that may or may not be beneficial as students are required to write papers far in advance; the lag likely results in better papers, but writers may have lost familiarity with the paper while waiting for the WF to respond (Soven, 2006). The read, respond, and conference process is typically repeated twice a semester, as WFs usually work with the same group of students on two different assignments. This allows the tutor to develop more of a relationship than is seen in WC environments (Soven, 2006).

**ESL tutoring.** Due to the increasing international student body seen across the nation, one may assume that ESL students participate in peer tutoring programs such as writing centers and Writing Fellows (Davis, 2012); however, little known research has been done on the topic. As stated previously, WC tutors often are hesitant about their abilities to meet ESL patron needs (Leki, 2009). No known research has looked into Writing Fellows working with ESL students, despite the close relationship WFs programs may foster with students. Limited resources exist to help generic writing tutors work effectively with ESL students.

Arguably the best resource for tutors to prepare to work with ESL students is Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth’s (editors) *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* (2004 and 2009), now on its second edition. Prior to the publication of this book, the only commonly seen publication on the topic was Judith K. Powers’ 1993 article in *The Writing Center Journal*, “Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer,”

republished in *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy & Sherwood, 1995) and then again as the only ESL-specific article in the 570-page volume, *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice* (Barnett & Blumner, 2008). Soven (2008) helps writing tutors be more effective at their roles, and has roughly five pages devoted to suggestions for working with ESL students. Clearly, resources to help peer tutoring program administrators help their tutors to work with ESL students are far too rare, and those that do exist focus primarily on writing center tutoring.

Although limited, these resources do provide valuable insights to the issue of tutoring second language writers. Powers (1993) suggests that the normal procedure for walk-in conferences of having the student give some background on the paper then reading it aloud may not be effective when working with L2 writers. Native English speaking (NES) students are more likely than non-native English speaking (NNES) students to pick up on grammatical mistakes by reading papers aloud, as NNES may simply not understand the grammatical feature in question. Instead, tutors need to teach the grammar in question, which most WC tutors are trained to avoid, as they are not editors or proofreaders. Powers (1993) further indicates that, due to the increasingly varied writing background of these international students, tutors may need to act less as collaborators than informants, directing the students more than they would with a NES student (p. 41). She summarizes that, in order for ESL students to benefit from their tutoring at WCs, tutors must be better trained and flexible when working with these students.

Providing a few more specific suggestions in her book, Soven (2008) suggests that tutors should use simple language, address grammar concerns as appropriate/comfortable for the tutor, watch for plagiarism, be encouraging and sympathetic, rephrase confusing



comments, take note of body language to check for confusion, and be patient (p. 108-109). Similar suggestions are provided in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (2009). While somewhat helpful, more specific guidelines would be valuable for tutors working in today's more culturally varied academic environment.

Turning to the last available resource, editors Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth (2009) have compiled a range of articles related to tutor various aspects of L2 writing, with topics ranging from plagiarism, to articles, to including activities when conferencing, along with some general second language acquisition and L2 writing theory articles.

When starting a conference, tutors have the responsibility to set the student at ease and dictate the tone of the session (Bruce, 2009). Many ESL students are intrinsically motivated to improve language use, and willingly accept assistance from others to improve because they recognize that their English is not perfect; however, members of some cultures, such as many those of the Middle East, have an extremely hard time admitting that they need any help at all, and tutors need to be aware of these potential issues (Bruce, 2009). In addition to the difficulty of merely asking for help, most ESL students are not familiar with the inner workings or procedures of WCs, and thus may avoid them completely (Bräuer, 2009).

In addition to setting his/her students at ease, tutors share the majority of the responsibility of the success of the conference. In order to accomplish as much as possible in a 30-minute conference, writing tutors need to have a clear plan, complete with goals they want to accomplish during their time together (Bruce, 2009; Macauley, 2005). However, not all “cultures prefer the Westernized manner of getting right down to business” (Bruce, 2009 p. 35), so tutors may want to explain how the conference will likely go to help the student understand what and how the tutor wants to accomplish. That said, tutors still should keep in

mind that students may have concerns with their papers that they wish to discuss; tutors need to ensure that those concerns definitely are met.

In her chapter, Bruce (2009) provides some suggestions for WC tutors to make effective plans-of-action in walk-in settings. Tutors can ask about the students' previous experiences with the center and what they know about it, then ask about the writing piece specifically. Typically, writing tutors ask about motivations in choosing topics (Murray, 2000), but this may not always be effective or timely when working with ESL students, as they likely have not been asked such questions in the past, and may need some time to puzzle the answers out in their minds (Bruce, 2009). Tutors then may need to ask more specific questions about the assignment details. After establishing a working knowledge of the situation and essay, tutors then should work with the student to set clear and workable goals for the remainder of the conference (Bruce, 2009). Clearly, just getting through the preamble of a WC conference with an ESL student can take a large portion of the tutor's available time. This conference time requirement can be partially eliminated by following the Writing Fellows model, as the tutors can read through the essay and develop a solid, well-formed plan-of-action before meeting face-to-face with the student. Regardless of the model chosen, a salient plan is required for a successful conference. It is also important to remember that an important part of tutoring is meeting the needs of the student, which requires flexibility (Bruce, 2009).

Once the conference is underway, writing tutors working with ESL students need to decide which features to focus on first. Typically, tutors focus on "higher order concerns" first, such as appropriateness to the assignment (where possible), global organization issues like thesis development and topic sentences, and evidence use, before looking at sentence-level issues like grammar and word choice (Soven, 2006). And, while most tutors don't ever get to

the grammar level, tutors who anticipate working with ESL students should be prepared to address grammar issues ranging from articles and subject-verb agreement to word choice issues such as collocates (Bruce, 2009; Deckert, 2009), in addition to the whole text with ideas and global organization (Minett, 2009; Staben & Nordhaus, 2009). To be effective tutors, WC and WF tutors need training so they can assist with the various aspects of L2 writing as outlined earlier in this review.

### **Administering Writing Fellows Programs**

WAC programs can be logistically difficult for novice administrators to start and run, and a top-down approach rarely works (Sandler, 1992). WAC administrators should ensure that faculty understand the reasons behind a curricular emphasis on writing. Faculty should also feel supported by the WAC program and administrators, rather than feel that they need to adjust due to the demands of said administrators. Administration and teaching require very different approaches, and clear lines should delineate between the two. Administrators can encourage solid teaching approaches by holding faculty workshops, reaching out to the best teachers on a campus, and linking WAC to improved pedagogy rather than simply improved writing (Sandler, 1992). A Writing Fellows program may be an effective way of helping students and instructors consider writing, and thus help to build a WAC program from the bottom up. And, in order for a Writing Fellows program to be successfully implemented, faculty and administration need to value the writing-focused pedagogical implications and support the WFs role in encouraging or providing support to the target students.

However, administering a WFs program can be logistically complicated. See the first section of Chapter 3: Methodology for a complete list and explanation of the activities and meetings BYU's WFs program uses to hire and train tutors, along with the adjustments to

better meet the target ESL audience of the ESL WFs program of this study. To concisely sum up BYU's program from an administrative perspective, WFs need to be recruited, hired, trained (using an advanced writing general education class), assigned to appropriate classes with understanding and invested faculty members, and checked up on to ensure quality feedback is being given. Each of these issues needs to be addressed by the budding WFs program administrator; for the sake of this thesis, only some major issues will be addressed.

Hiring and training tutors can be an issue for any peer-tutoring program, not just Writing Fellows programs. Since peer tutors generally need to find the balance between "peer" (accessible and open to negotiation/collaboration) and "tutor" (writing expert), selecting qualified and competent tutors is vital to the success of an organization like this (Hawkins, 1985). Tutors "must attempt to remain peers while being tutors" (Hawking, 1985 p. 11), and "lead their peers without threatening them (Haring-Smith, 1992 p. 181). Depending on the needs of the program, tutors may primarily be English or other humanities majors, or come from a range of majors in colleges across a campus. This model is utilized by BYU's WFs program, as the content expertise is useful when tutoring students of classes ranging from English, to engineering, to nutrition, to geology, and to history, among others. Accordingly, tutors need to be qualified to tutor writing in various disciplines if needed.

Once hired, tutors need to be trained. While no literature can be found addressing training tutors specifically to work as WFs, various methods have been employed for training tutors for writing centers, including requiring tutors to start as unpaid interns, following a set curriculum that isn't for college credit, and requiring that students take a training class for college credit, that may or may not be applicable for general education credit (Harris, 1992; Hawkins, 1985). However, once tutors are trained, administrators need to keep tutoring quality

high and keep tutors learning and improving. After a few semesters of this, tutor burnout can become a problem, especially in WFs programs where the tutors don't meet together daily (Haring-Smith, 1992). Regular meetings and retreats or other social activities are thus important to keep energy and morale high.

Despite requiring a fair amount of administrative attention, Writing Fellows programs actually may be a cost-effective way of providing quality tutoring for students. Haring-Smith, the person credited with starting the Writing Fellows model, said that “[b]ecause these programs are not very costly, they can be started easily and unobtrusively” (p. 183). The Brown University program was funded for three semesters using a contingency fund set aside to cover unpredictable heating costs. Unlike writing centers tutors, Writing Fellows are paid only for their time spent on Fellowing-related assignments, and not for any down time, which may more efficiently use university resources. Accordingly, ESL Writing Fellows programs may be an effective and affordable way of providing ESL students with the support and individual attention needed to improve writing mastery.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### Introduction

This research project consisted of an extension of Brigham Young University's current Writing Across the Curriculum peer tutoring program, Writing Fellows (WF), focused on training, supervising, and evaluating peer tutors assigned to work with ESL students. The priorities that traditional WFs follow were adapted to best meet the rhetorical and linguistic needs of ESL students. This section addresses the principles that motivate tutoring via the traditional Writing Fellows program at BYU, then how those principles were adapted for the ESL branch. The research design for this thesis is then addressed, including a description of the participants (both students and tutors), data collection procedures (including instruments used), and analysis procedures of the collected data.

All research methodologies were approved by BYU's branch of the Institutional Review Board, and all participants signed forms consenting to be research subjects. See Appendix E for the IRB Consent Form.

### Traditional Writing Fellows at BYU

BYU's Writing Fellows' mission statement (as found on the WF website) clearly explains the goals of the organization:

“In collaboration with professors and students across the curriculum, we build better writers at BYU by listening to the concerns of those we serve, by responding as an honest audience, by teaching sound writing skills and strategies, and by learning how to become better writers ourselves.” (<http://writingfellows.byu.edu/mission/>)

Per this mission statement, WFs work to promote student engagement with their own learning.

This is also seen in the values of the program:

1. Writing Fellows provide a community of support for each other and for the students and faculty we serve.
2. We value people over papers and writing as an essential part of a university education.

3. Through offering individual attention and feedback, we empower students to become stronger writers in all disciplines.
4. We respect each other and the professors and students we work with.
5. We provide a comfortable, friendly atmosphere for learning.

The WF mission statement and values can be applicable to BYU's ESL community, as ESL students benefit from the writing emphasis, individualized feedback, and respect outlined above. Accordingly, a close association with the tutors of the Writing Fellows may help ESL learners become better writers.

**Writing Fellows current processes.** Typically, WFs work with the classes of professors who request peer tutors for those classes. WFs take English 310: Writing and Pedagogy, in which they are trained to be effective peer tutors when hired. That same semester, they start working with students of a particular class. The coordinators of the WF program try to match assigned classes with tutor majors or successfully-completed courses when possible, thus providing students with content and writing "experts." BYU's WF program typically has 55 to 65 tutors working a semester, with newly-hired tutors making up about a third of that.

WFs work approximately 60 hours during a typical semester. Outside of some general meetings, retreats, and program contributions, such as giving training workshops, roughly 45 hours of the tutors' time is spent responding to papers and conferencing with students. WFs usually work with around ten students in a class on two different papers over the course of a semester. Students are (1) expected to give their WF tutor a complete draft of a paper. The tutor then (2) responds to each paper over the course of about a week, via marginal comments and a separate response letter, (3) returns the paper, and (4) schedules a conference, typically during the following week. At this conference, the tutor and student meet to discuss the paper, ideally by focusing on developing writing skills and not just improving the paper itself. This process is repeated for the second paper. At the end of the semester, students fill out evaluations about the

Fellow. Occasionally, professors may have WFs give in-class workshops on topics such as pre-writing, thesis development, or revision.

In order to ensure that WFs are meeting the needs of their students and matching instructor expectations, each group of tutors (called a “cohort,” with one organized per class) meets with either the Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator four times a semester. The first meeting is held at the beginning of the semester before the first assignment due date to discuss expectations for the semester. The second cohort meeting is held after the papers come in and each tutor has read through each and completed at least one full response. At this meeting the tutors review general trends in the papers, and the Coordinator offers feedback on tutor responses. This helps to ensure that the feedback WFs are giving to their students is appropriate and in line with expectations. After finishing the first round of tutoring, the Fellows meet for the third cohort meeting to discuss how that round went, along with expectations for the second round of tutoring. WFs then complete their duties and administer evaluations. After the evaluations have been collected, the Fellows meet one final time to discuss the second round and evaluations, and then to make goals for the following semester.

In addition to these small meetings where the Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator provide individualized feedback, WFs are expected to attend various other training meetings, including an opening and closing social, a retreat (primarily focused on providing tutoring instruction), and at least three workshops, which address various aspects of tutoring. In this manner, the program administrators prepare instruction based on the needs of the tutors and help them to become better tutors.

When tutoring, traditional WFs are trained to respond to student writing from the “top down,” focusing on the following priorities, in order:



1. Assignment—the paper fits the assignment, using the correct genre, audience, and global format.
2. Thesis/Main idea—a controlling statement can be found that effectively guides the reader through the paper. The scope of the topic is appropriate, and the ideas it contains are significant and worth writing about, with a solid argument represented when appropriate. The paper is built around the thesis.
3. Global organization—the paper contains a descriptive and appropriate title, an introduction, and conclusion. The body of the paper contains connected and logical ideas.
4. Paragraph organization—each paragraph has one exclusive main idea, with a topic sentence, body content, and a summarizing concluding sentence.
5. Supporting evidence—paragraphs contain sufficient evidence to support the point solidly, and evidence is used appropriately according to the discipline. Evidence includes references to primary and secondary sources, and original research as appropriate, cited using the appropriate style (APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.). Sources are integrated properly.
6. Style and correctness—the author writes in academic English, with appropriate formality. Sentences are efficient, effective, and elegant, with correct mechanics and grammar.

Based on the researcher's experience with the traditional WF program, very few traditional WFs actually ever address style and correctness issues with their students. Primarily, Fellows help students match professor expectations and create an effective thesis. While this global assistance

is valuable to both NES and NNES students, ESL students likely don't get the linguistic assistance they need to properly polish academic writing.

**ESL alterations.** Obviously, some revisions would be necessary to create a branch of the WF program that would be more accessible for ESL students. The faculty coordinator of the WF program fully supported these additions, given outside funding for the ESL-focused tutors. This allowed the researcher to take advantage of the infrastructure already in place when establishing the new ESL WFs program.

An additional nineteen tutors to focus on ESL tutoring in future semesters were hired. Spring Term, 2012, a special section of English 310 was offered to train these tutors, focusing on L2 writing. Fourteen of the nineteen tutors took this training class. The remaining five tutors were hired to start Fall, 2012, and took the regular Writing Fellows training class, along with additional ESL-focused training meetings: one at the beginning of the semester (pre-tutoring), two during tutoring, and one at the end of the semester (post-tutoring). These tutors worked as WFs concurrent to taking the training class, and for all future semesters they are willing and able to participate in the program.

These ESL WFs tutored students of the first-year writing course for international students, English Language (ELang) 105. All students of the five sections of ELang 105 offered Fall, 2012, received Writing Fellows tutoring. As outlined above, ESL WFs work with each student on two different assignments. However, due to the needs of second language writers, the tutors met with each student twice for each assignment—once for rhetoric issues (organization, thesis development, etc.) and once for linguistic issues (grammar, word choice problems, etc.).

Accordingly, two sets of priorities were necessary, one covering global organization issues, and one covering sentence-level issues. The global priorities remained largely unchanged

based on the traditional priorities as outlined earlier, with the exception of Style and Correctness, which was removed and expanded upon, resulting in the sentence-level priorities outlined below:

1. Patterns of error—with any sentence-level features, WFs should focus first on patterns of error that impede meaning significantly. Minor grammatical errors that may be distracting but don't impede meaning should be addressed later, if time permits. See Priority 4 for the important grammatical features to focus on first.
2. Inconsistent use—if students are using specific grammatical features correctly in certain contexts and incorrectly in others, these are good features to teach. Students don't completely understand the rules behind such features in all situations, so would benefit from some explicit tutoring. Again, see Priority 4 for the important grammar structures to focus on first.
3. Coherence—the Western academic approach of frequently introducing an idea then restating that idea at the start of the next sentence before transitioning to the next, related idea (A-AB-BC, etc.) is alien to many other cultures. ESL students may thus need assistance creating sentence-level cohesion. See Williams (2000) for more on creating cohesion. Transitions may also need some focus.
4. Global grammatical errors—the following grammatical features should take priority as issues may impede meaning: verb tenses/forms, modals, conditional sentences, passive voice, dependent clauses, sentence structures, pronoun referents, word choice, collocates, word order, and sentence fragments or run-ons (adapted from Lane & Lange, 2011). Tutors should focus on errors which follow patterns first, then less-regular errors. If a student uses many sentences that are not clear, this should be addressed.

5. Local grammatical errors— while the following grammatical features may be distracting, they typically do not impede meaning significantly, and thus should not be focused on first when tutoring: subject-verb agreement, articles, singular/plural nouns, word forms, and punctuation (again, adapted from Lane & Lange, 2011).

Only focus on these features if the global grammatical issues have been addressed.

These sentence-level priorities are generally to be addressed by the tutor during their second conference with their students. However, if enough sentence-level issues are found that impede meaning to the level that the tutors cannot comprehend intended meaning or organizational approaches at all, tutors should not be afraid to switch the order of the priorities to address enough linguistic issues that the tutors have an accurate picture of what the student is trying to say. At that point, talking through intended ideas may be the best approach to make sure the content is appropriate for the assignment. ESL WFs need to be more flexible than traditional WFs in their tutoring approach and adjust to best meet their students' varied needs.

ESL WFs were trained to focus on the priorities as listed above in English 310 and additional training meetings. Regular observations by the Assistant Coordinator and “Senior” Fellows (experienced Fellows who managed the tutoring of a class) also helped provide evaluative feedback to the tutors.

## **Participants**

This section addresses the various participants of this study. First, general information on the ESL WFs is given. The student and teacher participants are then described. For the student participants, background information such as native language, year in school, and major is given.

**ESL Writing Fellows tutors.** ESL WFs were recruited primarily from classes required for BYU's TESOL minor. Potential Fellows went through a hiring process which required an

application, consisting of (1) two thesis-driven writing samples, (2) a cover letter, and (3) an unofficial transcript, as well as an interview, consisting of the prospective tutor teaching a five minute skill and having a mock-conference with one of the interviewers. WF program administrators look at both writing aptitude as well as the ability to work with students in a non-threatening or controlling manner. WFs are expected to work at least two semesters to maximize the benefit of the training cost. When hired, tutors start out making \$8.25 an hour, and receive a \$0.25 raise each additional semester they work as a WF.

Of the 21 tutors hired, all but three were TESOL minors, with two being Generation 1.5 students themselves, and were fluent in Mandarin and Japanese respectively. Those two tutors were hired on the basis of their writing and language skills, despite having no experience with language pedagogy. The final tutor was an editing minor. The other tutors were all in various stages of their undergraduate degrees, including their TESOL minors, and had varying language teaching experience. However, most of these tutors had taken at least two TESOL classes, including the literacy class where they learn how to teach reading and writing. Five of the tutors, in addition to TESOL minors, minored in such subjects as communication disorders, Italian (two of the tutors), Spanish, and editing. The Fellows also had various majors. Nine of them were linguistics majors (one double majored in linguistics and Chinese, and another double majored in linguistics and Spanish translation) The others majored in Spanish, Spanish translation, Asian studies, English language, media arts, Chinese, and communication disorders respectively.

TESOL minors who work as an ESL WF received internship credit, which is required for the minor. By providing both hourly wages and internship credit, this ESL WFs program is likely to get the best of the TESOL-minor pool. As ESL WF interns, TESOL minors get valuable

experience working both with ESL students and experienced ESL writing teachers, and may be more employable upon graduation.

**ELang 105 classes and students.** The participants of this study consisted of ESL students of the five sections of ELang 105 offered Fall, 2012. Two sections were taught by Teacher A while the other three of these sections were taught by Teacher B. Both were experienced ESL writing teachers, although neither had an extensive composition background. Having only two instructors helped to reduce teacher variable as a factor, although each teacher likely varied instructional approach within their own sections based on individual student needs. Despite the original plan to make one of these sections a control group, the researcher decided to approach this thesis from a more qualitative approach, as this is a new adaptation of the Writing Fellows model in the field of second language writing, and qualitative data should provide a basis for further investigative research. See the Data Collection section later in this chapter.

Teacher A had eleven students in one of her sections and thirteen in the other. Teacher B's three sections had nine students, ten students, and eleven students, respectively. This resulted in 54 potential student participants in this study, although only 42 completed both pre- and post-program surveys. These students had quite diverse educational backgrounds; despite these classes being freshman composition classes, many of the students were sophomores and juniors, with a few seniors enrolled as well. The students also came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. See Table 1 for the complete breakdown of participant native language and year in school for Teachers A and B. The list of student majors of each group is listed after the table. As this study made use of existing classes, the researcher had little control over who enrolled.

Table 1

*Student Participants: Numbers of Students of Native Language Groups and Year in School, Arranged by Teacher*

	Teacher A	Teacher B
<b>Language Group</b>		
Spanish/Portuguese	9	11
Chinese	2	4
Korean	3	5
Japanese	2	1
Arabic	5	5
Other	3	4
<b>Year in School</b>		
Freshman	10	13
Sophomore	8	8
Junior	1	6
Senior	5	3

Teacher A's two sections consisted of the following majors, with numbers of students of that major in parentheses: pre-management (2), mathematics (1), open major (1), psychology (1), mechanical engineering (1), electrical engineering (1), chemical engineering (1), computer engineering (1), computer science (1), leisure services management (1), studio arts (1), international relations (1), biochemistry (1), dietetics (1), sociology (1), illustration (1), Spanish (1), applied statistics and analytics (1), economics (1), communications (1), microbiology (1), linguistics (1), and political science (1).

Teacher B's three sections consisted of the following majors, with numbers of students of that major in parentheses: pre-management (7), nursing pre-major (3), international relations (2), neuroscience (1), exercise and wellness (1), leisure services management (1), civil engineering

(1), chemical engineering (2), Latin American studies (1), actuarial science (1), communications (3), information technology (1), illustration (1), psychology (1), genetics and biotechnology (1), and open major (3).

### **Data Collection**

Student response data were collected using three methods: pre- and post-program surveys, individual semi-structured interviews with select participants, and focus groups consisting of all students of all five ELang 105 sections. These different collection approaches allow for triangulation that may give a more accurate observation of the students' perceptions of the ESL WFs program.

However, while most of the Fellows performed all required tasks adequately, one Fellow assigned to one of Teacher B's sections unfortunately did not, due to generally not being prompt and proactive in responding to student writing and concerns. Based on the student responses, this Fellow did not properly help the students that he/she worked with, which resulted in poor perceptions of the ESL Writing Fellows program for those students. This study investigated an ESL Writing Fellows program as it was implemented in freshman composition courses by tutors who fully represent the ideals and theories of such a WAC peer-tutoring program. As a result, the survey, interview, and focus group data for the six students who worked with this unreliable Fellow were primarily removed from this study, although they are briefly explained in Chapter 4.

**Surveys.** The student participants were given a survey at the start of the semester, and near the end when tutoring had been completed. These surveys were essentially the same, although the second asked more probing questions about their experiences with their Writing Fellow. See Appendix A for the complete pre-program survey and Appendix B for the post-program tutoring additions. The pre- and post-program surveys were comprised of the Daly-



Miller Writing Apprehension Test (1975), a self-efficacy instrument (Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante, 2001), the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index (Cohen & Chi, 2002), and some informal questions about tutoring experiences.

To measure writing apprehension, the researcher used the much-studied Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (1974), used for measuring anxiety about writing for classroom assignments (Erkin & Saban, 2011; Gungle & Taylor, 1989). A copy of the online version is included in Appendix A. To measure self-efficacy, I used an adapted form of Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante's (2001) self-efficacy instrument, which was created using Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory that states that a student's self-efficacy predicts that student's achievement. Instead of a Likert scale, I used a 0-100 format, which Pajares, Hartley & Valiante (2001) argue is psychometrically stronger than the typical seven or ten point scale. To measure writing strategy use, I administered the writing strategy portion of the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index (Cohen & Chi, 2002), which has been used many times in second language acquisition (SLA) studies. Although the first two instruments were not designed for L2 writing, these traditional composition instruments should be a good starting point for the current exploratory study. Variations that better fit L2 studies may be appropriate to develop for future research.

In addition to the established instruments mentioned above, the researcher asked some basic questions about participants' previous and current experiences with writing tutoring. As no validated tools could be found, these questions were quite simple. See Appendix A for the complete survey, including peer tutoring questions, and Appendix B for the specific list of questions used in the post-program survey peer tutoring additions.

**Interviews.** After briefly analyzing the survey data by looking at the change between pre- and post-program responses, three students from Teacher A's sections and two students from

Teacher B's sections were selected to participate in individual interviews with the researcher. Per the established guidelines of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), one of the students from each instructor group responded favorably of the peer tutoring, one from each responded somewhat neutrally, and the last participant responded negatively of the tutoring. In this manner, the entire range of perceptions was addressed, which grants a more accurate perception than a simple average (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990), although general trends were also considered and are presented in Chapter 4.

These interviews were conducted under the guise of investigating the ELang 105 classes in general, without letting the students know that the researcher was specifically interested in investigating the Writing Fellows program as it was implemented in the ESL setting. Questions started out broad, asking about general trends in the class and what was most helpful to the student, before narrowing down to the tutoring. The interviews were all semi-structured, which allowed the researcher to probe for greater depth of data (Kvale, 1996). See Appendix C for the complete list of specific starting questions and interview processes.

**Focus groups.** After the interviews were completed, focus groups were held in class near the end of the semester, with all students participating. The larger classes were split into two individual focus groups, or between five and eight participants each, following established recommendations for focus group data-collection (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Morgan & Scannell, 1997). This resulted in a total of eight focus groups being held. These focus groups were led by the researcher and an assistant, with an additional assistant helping to record student responses for each, to verify participants' thoughts and opinions.

The focus groups allowed researchers to glean additional information about student perceptions of the ESL Writing Fellows program. Via focus groups, participants can openly

discuss ideas and opinions, and thus help researchers formulate more accurate perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Similar to the interviews, focus group facilitators started off asking broad questions before focusing on the actual tutoring, to avoid leading the students. When conducting focus groups, the researcher and other facilitators and scribes wore casual clothes and acted like student peers. This helped set the focus group participants at ease.

**Instructor and tutor insights.** While this study focuses primarily on the responses of the students themselves to the ESL Writing Fellows program, the writing instructors and Writing Fellows also provided valuable insights into the successes and weaknesses of the ESL WF program as it was implemented in this study. Their insights were obtained from non-structured interviews with the ELang 105 instructors and the Fellows. These interviews were held at various points during and after the semester ended.

### **Data Analysis**

As stated earlier, the triangulation of survey, interview, and focus group data allowed the researcher to glean a more accurate picture of the students' perceptions of the ESL Writing Fellows program. While some quantitative data could be obtained from the surveys, the primary mode of analysis consisted of a qualitative approach. Accordingly, the large volume of generated data was analyzed by organizing and generating themes and categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), with the researcher developing generalizations from the student perspectives revealed in the interviews and focus groups (Borg & Gall, 1989).

**Surveys analysis.** Although not the primary focus of this study, the surveys were analyzed by comparing the pre- and post-program responses by each participant, adjusting for whether or not the question asked was positive (e.g. "I look forward to writing down my ideas.") or negative (e.g. "I avoid writing") when appropriate. The differences between the surveys were

then tallied. The total response differences provided the criteria by which students were asked to participate in follow-up interviews. This section will provide the specific details for the analysis of the student survey responses. For all instruments, a higher positive difference indicated a more positive attitude, while a negative difference indicated a more negative attitude.

The Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (1975) is commonly used to gauge student attitudes towards writing in general. This test is composed of items that reflect positive attitudes (e.g. “I look forward to writing down my ideas”), referred to as “positive” questions in this thesis, and items that reflect negative attitudes (e.g. “I avoid writing”), or “negative” questions. Participants marked the degree of agreement or disagreement on a five point scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree). Responses were converted to a numeric value, and the difference between the post- and pre-program surveys calculated and added up, both for negative and positive questions. For example, if, in the pre-program survey, a participant marked Disagree for the item “I look forward to writing down my ideas” (a positive question) then, in the post-program survey he/she marked Agree for the same item, the initial response would be coded as a 2 with the post-program response marked a 4, for a difference of 2. For the negative questions “I avoid writing,” an initial response of Strongly Agree would be coded as a 5 while a post-program response of Neither Agree nor Disagree would be coded a 3 for a difference of -2. This would indicate a decreased level of negativity for this item. For simplicity’s sake, and to make the data more accessible in table form, the orientations for negative questions were reversed. In the example above, the difference of -2 would then be converted to a positive 2, indicating that the student felt more positive (or at least less negative) about the item in question. Thus, for positive and negative questions for this instrument, a positive difference indicates a more desirable attitude toward writing.

Items in Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante's (2001) self-efficacy assessment tool asked participants to rate themselves on various mechanical aspects of writing, such as writing "a strong paragraph that has a good topic sentence or main idea," or "using the correct forms of words in English." See Appendix A for the complete set of self-efficacy items as seen in the pre-survey. As with the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension instrument, the pre- and post-program survey response differences were calculated and summed for each participant. A positive difference indicates an increase in confidence about writing structure and mechanics.

The responses to the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index (Cohen & Chi, 2002) show which writing strategies participants used at the beginning and end of the semester. Similar to the other instruments, participant responses ranging from "I use this strategy and like it," "I have tried this strategy and would use it again," "I've never used this strategy but am interested in it," and "This strategy doesn't fit for me," were converted to a numeric scale and the differences were calculated. Negative differences indicated increased usage of strategies, and thus responses were converted to a positivity scale similar to that of the Daly-Miller instrument. However, if a student responded "This strategy is not a fit for me" in their post-response, that response was thrown out, as calculating the difference was logical only if they were still using the strategy. In addition to the total change in strategy use, the change in number of strategies used was also tallied for each participant. Such strategies included planning out in advance how to write academic papers, reviewing what has been written before continuing, and revising once or twice to improve the language and content. See Appendix A for the complete list of items of this instrument as seen in the complete pre-program survey.

**Student interviews analysis.** Student interviews were analyzed by looking for student attitudes towards the ESL Writing Fellows program. Chapter 4 provides specific details about the

interview participant responses to questions about the class itself and the impact of the Writing Fellows on various aspects of the participant's writing. Themes were then drawn and analyzed from these responses.

**Student focus groups analysis.** The focus group data were analyzed by looking for student responses and thoughts about the ESL WFs. Focus group facilitators and scribes were instructed to pay special attention to the way things were said, not just what was said. And, accordingly, the emotions were analyzed along with the actual ideas where appropriate by noting emotional states and discussing the implications for the program. Even more than from the interviews, themes were drawn from focus group participant responses. These themes are presented and analyzed in Chapter 4.

**Writing teacher and ESL Writing Fellow interviews analysis.** Similar to the student interviews, the responses from the non-structured interviews conducted with the writing teachers and ESL Fellows were analyzed by looking for their perceptions of the ESL WFs program. Themes were also drawn from these responses.

## Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter introduces and discusses the results from the student instruments (pre- and post-program surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups), along with the non-structured interviews with the writing instructors and Writing Fellows (WF), in that order. The data collection was driven by the research questions outlined in Chapter One:

1. What are ESL students' perceptions of an ESL-focused Writing Fellows Program that supports their freshman composition courses?
2. How do the students respond to the tutoring given them by their Writing Fellow?
3. What are the perceptions of writing instructors and ESL Writing Fellows toward the ESL Writing Fellows Program?

Data answering these questions are outlined in this chapter. While each participant would provide valuable information and insights about the ESL Writing Fellows program, it is not feasible to investigate each story in its entirety. Instead, interview responses from five student participants are presented, along with general trends and topics of note from each of the focus groups and the interviews with instructors and tutors (Patton, 1990) based on the experiences of the researcher in working with Writing Fellows and L2 writers for four years. These trends are presented and discussed as “themes,” and administrative implications for the themes are given. While some discussion is included in the section for each instrument, the bulk of the discussion is found in the themes section.

### Student Instruments

Data from the three student instruments are presented in this section. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, one Fellow did not portray the ESL Writing Fellows program

appropriately. As the focus of this study was to address a fully-implemented ESL Writing Fellows program in freshman composition courses by competent tutors who fully represent the ideals and theories of such a WAC peer-tutoring program, the survey, interview, and focus group data for the six students who worked with this unreliable Fellow were removed from this study, although they are briefly explained here.

In the survey, four of the students associated with this Fellow reported that they had a largely negative experience, one reported neither a positive or negative experience, as he didn't "get specific feedback," and the last student reported that the experience was "positive when they helped me with the grammar, but negative when they helped me with content of the paper because what they said was different from what the teacher said." In an interview with Susie, a student who worked with this Fellow, she said "I didn't feel like I got helped [sic] from my Writing Fellow as much as I expected," although she did say she received "a little bit of grammar" help. Susie also noted that the Fellow was busy, and thus didn't "read [her paper] well." This Fellow also didn't typically teach many of the rules associated with Susie's grammatical errors, responding simply "we just say it like this."

Coincidentally, six of the seven participants of one focus group had this WF, and had similarly poor experiences with that Fellow. For example, one participant said that the Fellow would reschedule conference times the night before, and the student wouldn't see the email and go to meet at the conference, but then "it was [the student's fault that they] didn't meet successfully." Another participant noted that the Fellow left the paper at his/her house. Another said that, when they met, the Fellow said "I haven't read your paper yet, but we can go over it." The participant then said, "You're supposed to read it before! I don't want to be here for an hour. I mean, I could be there for an hour, but I don't want to be." These insights, while valuable from



an administrative perspective, portray a skewed sample that was not exposed to the typical Fellow experience and thus will not be portrayed later.

**Student surveys.** While the survey responses do not allow for a separation of the actual impact of the ESL Writing Fellows program from the in-class instruction or teacher feedback, the results of these surveys may prove valuable to additional studies. For each instrument, differences between the pre- and post-program survey responses were calculated and tallied. Additionally, the participant responses to the open ended question asking about students' responses to the Writing Fellows tutoring are given. See Table 2 for the complete tallied differences for each of the items from the student participant survey responses. This section will briefly review how those differences were calculated, as explained more completely in Chapter 3.

As outlined in the analysis section of Chapter 3, the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (1975) differences were calculated by subtracting the pre-program survey responses with those of the post-program survey. Negative question responses were then converted to a positivity scale. See Columns 2 and 3 of Table 2 for the summed differences for the positive and negative Daly-Miller items, respectively.

The differences between the post- and pre-program survey responses of Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante's (2001) self-efficacy assessment tool were calculated and tallied for each participant. These differences can be found in Column 4 of Table 2.

Finally, the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index (Cohen & Chi, 2002) results were also converted to a numeric scale with the differences calculated and tallied. In addition to the general usage of writing strategies, the differences in numbers of strategies participants used were calculated and reported. See Column 5 of Table 2 for the strategy use data and Column 6 for the change in numbers of strategies used for each participant.

Column 7 of Table 2 contain the positive or negative response of the students to the tutoring, determined based on the participants' responses to the open-ended question asking if the WF's experience was positive or negative and in what way.

Table 2

*Survey Responses for Student Participants: Summed Differences Between the Post- and Pre-program Surveys for the Daly-Miller Test, Positive (Column 2) and Negative Questions (Column 3), the Writing Self-efficacy Assessment (Column 4), the Writing Portion of the Language Strategy Use Index (Usage Change in Column 5 and Change in Number of Strategies Used in Column 6), and Whether Participants had a Positive (+) or Negative (-) Experience with their Writing Fellow (Column 7)*

Participant	Daly-Miller (Positive)	Daly-Miller (Negative)	Self- Efficacy	Strategy Use	Number of Strategies Used	WF Experience
Teacher A						
1 (Brent)	-1	-3	-10	1	-1	+
2	4	10	480	11	-1	+
3	13	11	93	0	0	+
4 (Maria)	13	25	595	7	-1	+
5 (Jean)	-4	-10	10	4	0	-
6	10	10	167	1	-1	+
7	1	2	28	-1	-1	+
8	2	5	172	7	0	+
9	-7	-3	15	2	-1	+
10	-4	-1	3	1	0	+
11	-4	-8	100	-7	0	+
12	10	7	282	15	+3	+
13	4	-1	-49	2	0	+
14	-6	5	70	11	+3 -1 <sup>a</sup>	+
15	2	0	10	0	0	+
16	3	1	20	1	0	+
17	-2	-2	-15	0	-1	+
18	-1	-1	10	-1	0	+
Totals	33	47	1981	54	-1	17+/1-

Teacher B						
1 (Seth)	0	0	55	0	0	+
2	3	-4	10	6	0	+
3	-9	-2	95	0	+1 -7	+
4	2	0	0	-2	0	+
5	0	-6	155	4	-1	+

6	4	8	-50	-2	0	+
7 (George)	3	3	75	-3	0	+
8	-13	-6	5	0	-1	+
9	-6	-10	20	-2	0	+
10	1	-2	10	6	0	+
11	-1	-4	170	-2	0	+
12	2	0	40	6	0	+
13	-7	3	15	-1	0	+
14	-2	1	55	0	0	+
15	1	1	-85	3	0	+
16	0	-2	-105	6	+4	+
17	6	7	10	-2	0	+
18	-2	-6	3	-1	0	+
Totals	-18	-19	478	16	-2	18+/0-

*Note:* Names in parenthesis are given for the three participants from each teacher selected to participate in interviews. These names are pseudonyms as all names given within this thesis have been altered to protect participant identities.

<sup>a</sup>Participant A14 used 3 additional strategies at the end of the semester, but dropped one.

While this research project did not focus on quantitative data, the results outlined do provide some interesting information. In this discussion, student participants are referred to by their number from Table 2 and which teacher group they were from, following the format 1A, 1B, etc. For all instruments, higher positive changes indicate stronger positive attitudes toward writing in general, and negative changes indicate stronger negative attitudes. For example, participant 4A had a change of 13 on the positive Daly-Miller items, 25 on the negative Daly-Miller items, 595 on the self-efficacy assessment, and 7 on the strategy inventory, indicating much more positive attitudes about writing, despite a loss of one strategy. Participant 4B showed fairly neutral attitude change, with 2, 0, 0, -2, and 0, respectively with no change in numbers of strategies used. Participant 9B showed an overall increase of negativity, with -6, -10, 20 (a slight positive increase), -2, and 0, respectively, also with no change in numbers of strategies used.

Although beyond the scope of this study, the data show large differences between the groups of Teacher A and B, with stronger indications of positivity seen from Teacher A's students on the self-efficacy assessment and the strategy use inventory than Teacher B's students.

Additionally, Teacher A's group generally felt more positive about writing at the end of the semester, as seen by the positive Daly-Miller test scores, while Teacher B's group generally felt more negative about writing, as seen by the negative Daly-Miller test scores. This difference may imply teacher impact on the students' attitudes; however, further research is needed.

The Daly-Miller items in Columns 2 and 3 reveal a general increase in positive attitudes and a decrease of negative attitudes toward writing for students of Teacher A as seen from the summed and totaled differences of 33 and 47. For example, participant 6A reported an increase of 10 on both the positive and negative Daly-Miller test items, responding that she agrees more with items like "I look forward to writing down my ideas," and disagreeing more with items like "My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my essay." Conversely, students of Teacher B were generally less positive, -18, and more negative, -19, on those same items. Participant 8B disagreed more with items like "I have no fear of my writing being evaluated," and agreed more with items like "My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my essay."

Students of both teacher groups reported an increase in confidence pertaining to the mechanics of writing as seen in the gains on the self-efficacy assessment from Column 4, at 1981 for Teacher A and 478 for Teacher B. This suggests that students like participants 12A and 11B feel more positive about their abilities to use organization and grammatical structures like introductions and word forms.

Similarly, as seen in Columns 5 and 6, students of both teacher groups reported an increase in writing strategies usage, at 54 and 16, respectively, and a slight decrease in total numbers of strategies used, at -1 and -2. Students like participants 2A and 2B reported using strategies like waiting to edit until all ideas are written and revising more frequently.

Interestingly, participants like 7A and 3B reported not using some strategies in the post-program

survey that they were using in the pre-program survey, like using reference materials to find words in the target language. This may be due to students' increased understanding of which strategies work best for them individually.

Finally, as seen in Column 7, all but one of the participants from both teacher groups reported an overall positive experience with the ESL WFs, suggesting that these students appreciated the private tutoring. The open-ended question asking why the WFs experience was positive or negative provided some interesting feedback.

Of the participants who reported negative feelings about the tutoring, two commented that the tutoring wasn't effective, not because of anything the tutor did wrong, but because they (the students) were not properly prepared when they met. This was reflected when Participant 8B said that the experience with the Writing Fellow was negative "because I wasn't prepared to meet with my Writing Fellow," a theme reiterated by participant 18B.

From the participants who reported that the tutoring experience was positive, the many comments range from assistance on organization to grammar issues. Participant 8A wrote that his/her Fellow helped with "topic sentences, and conclusion of a paragraph [sic] is an introduction (transition) to the next paragraph." Participant 3A, despite showing only slight changes, said that the tutoring was helpful because the tutor provided "[b]etter words that I can use in my papers that make it more interesting." Another participant said that the tutoring was "[p]ositive, because [the Fellow] gave me feedback and guided me to solve the errors I made."

Generally, the feedback provided from the participants via the surveys suggested that they found the WF program to be helpful to them as an L2 writer. Of the 35 participants who reported having had a positive experience, 31 referred to specific skills that the Fellow taught them (some common themes were thesis sentences, paragraph organization, and grammar issues),

while the other four said only that they were helpful, using vague terms. Twenty-two of the participants also mentioned that they appreciated receiving individual feedback targeted at their specific issues. Participant 14A said of the tutoring, “My experience with my writing fellow was positive. Almost too positive.” Participant 22B said the Fellowing was “[p]ositive because it has helped me to improve in my writing a lot faster and better.” Several participants reported that the conferences allowed the students to clarify feedback and work to improve the paper.

**Student survey discussion.** In response to the first research question inquiring about student perceptions of an ESL-focused Writing Fellows program, these survey results suggest that students perceive that the ESL WFs program helped them in their freshman composition courses, as all but one survey respondent felt that participating in the WFs program was an overall positive experience for them.

In response to the research question inquiring about the nature of the student responses to an ESL WFs program, survey data indicate that students felt that the program helped them improve various aspects of writing in the L2, ranging from content, to rhetoric/organizational issues, to grammatical issues, as 31 of the respondents mentioned specific structure- or grammatical-based feedback from the Fellow that was helpful to them. Several survey participants noted that they valued content assistance from their Writing Fellow, specifically helping to clarify vague sentences. Accordingly, the students responded favorably to the individualized feedback provided by the ESL WFs program. Further discussion about the students’ perceptions of the program is included in the themes section of this chapter.

**Student interviews.** While all 36 interview participants likely could contribute valuable information on the implementation of the ESL Writing Fellows program, limitations allow for only a few of those stories to be told. This section will address the perceptions of five

participants selected to be interviewed based on survey responses. As outlined earlier, three participants from Teacher Group B were originally selected and interviewed; however, due to the involvement of one of these students with the Fellow who did not properly represent the ESL Writing Fellows program, that interview will not be reported here.

One interview participant reported a more negative attitude toward writing and a dislike of the Writing Fellowing process from her survey, one participant from each group reported a slight improvement in attitude for writing and/or neutral opinions of the Fellowing, while the remaining participants from each group reported a strong improvement in attitude toward writing and strong opinions in favor of the Fellowing. By seeking participants to interview from the range of responses, the researcher could glean a more accurate—broad and yet deep—picture of attitudes towards Writing Fellows than a mere average would allow for, despite not reflecting the perspectives of the majority of the student participants (Patton, 1990).

While not specifically selected for these characteristics, the interviewees represented a wide range of ethnicities and backgrounds. Two females and three males participated. One participant was from Brazil, one was from Peru, one was from Tahiti, one was from Singapore, and one was from Hong Kong. One considered himself bilingual in English and Mandarin. Two of the participants were returning to school after fairly extended leaves, one of whom was older than the other participants as she was returning after raising her children. Accordingly, these six participants represent a very wide range of backgrounds and capabilities.

For each interviewee, the following information is given: (1) general background information, including writing experience, (2) the summed changes in the response between the pre- and post-program survey portions to explain why they were selected to be interviewed, and (3) their responses to the interview questions about ELang 105 and the Writing Fellows program.

The interview for the participant who showed a negative trend in attitudes toward writing in general and the Writing Fellows tutoring specifically is given first, followed by those who showed no change or a slight improvement in perceptions, and finally those who displayed a large improvement in attitudes toward writing in general and the Writing Fellows tutoring specifically. Students from Teacher A's sections are followed by the equivalent (negative, neutral, and positive attitude) representative from Teacher B's sections. The implications of these interviews are discussed after the interview data are presented. All names used are pseudonyms.

***Jean from Peru: largely negative views.*** Jean, an older Peruvian student studying Spanish teaching at BYU, was one of the students from Teacher A's group. This was her first semester returning to school after getting married approximately 20 years previously. Prior to her marriage, she attended BYU for four semester before dropping out to raise her family. She had not written very extensively in academic settings prior to this semester in either Spanish or English, although she had written in BYU's Intensive English Program when she first came to the United States. This writing experience "was not quite academic" in nature. Previously, she didn't feel comfortable writing in English, although she said that she is now "starting to like it more, due to [her] teacher." However, this attitude was not reflected in her survey responses so it may have been an attempt to meet perceived interviewer expectations.

Jean was asked to interview due to her more negative survey responses, as she reported having had a negative experience with the Writing Fellows of this group. See Table 3 for her summed changes for each of the survey sections.

Table 3

*Jean's Survey Responses: The Daly-Miller Test (positive and negative questions separated), the writing self-efficacy assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Index summed differences between the post- and pre-program surveys*



Instrument	Summed Difference
Daly-Miller (Positive)	-10
Daly-Miller (Negative)	2
Self-efficacy Assessment	-22
Language Strategy Use Index	-4

In her responses, Jean's difference on the positive portion of the Daly-Miller Test showed a negative change, suggesting that she felt less confident about her abilities with writing at the end of the semester. Interestingly, her responses on the negative portion of the Daly-Miller Test showed a slight improvement, suggesting that she might have felt less negative about her abilities by the end of the semester. However, the negative changes seen in her self-efficacy responses suggest that she felt that her structure abilities (thesis statements, proper vocabulary, etc.) were lower at the end of the semester. Additionally, she used the following writing strategies less frequently: writing new vocabulary words, planning writing in advance, using reference materials, and waiting to edit until all content is written out. Jean also responded that she had a negative experience with her Fellow, as she "learned nothing."

Regarding the ELang 105 class, Jean felt that something was "off," although it helped her to improve her writing somewhat. She felt that teacher expectations were too high, resulting in low scores, and there wasn't a proper "balance" in class of step-by-step instruction. Jean found the teacher-student conferences held on various drafts to be most helpful, but would have appreciated having more access to the teacher as students needed to be proactive and seek the instructor out. She also found class discussion to be helpful.

When asked what prompted change between drafts of her rhetorical analysis, Jean responded that tutoring was most helpful when working with the paper. However, when asked to clarify, she referred primarily to the walk-in ESL writing lab that was accessible to students on campus. She said that it was hard to get time with her teacher to get feedback, so the lab tutors

had a larger impact. She did note that the lab tutors were “too nice,” so she also went to the traditional Writing Center, where the tutors were “more direct” in their tutoring.

The interview concluded with a discussion of her experiences with her assigned Writing Fellow. Jean noted that her WF “was terrible” because she wasn’t proactive with tasks such as using APA handouts or distributing conference sign-up sheets. When asked about useful organization information from her WF, she responded that nothing was helpful, as the comments weren’t clear. Jean did find the sentence-level feedback “absolutely” helpful as the Fellow reminded Jean of grammar rules and helped her learn to write more directly. She also appreciated the Fellow’s knowledge of writing conventions of other cultures (by which the researcher assumes the Fellow referred to contrastive rhetoric in their conference), which helped clarify expectations for English academic writing. She closed by commenting that the feedback was useful in general, although she would have preferred receiving more helpful, specific feedback.

***Brent from Brazil: neutral views.*** Brent, from Teacher A’s section, was a first semester freshman from Brazil where he studied at the university level for two years. He said that he doesn’t really enjoy writing in Portuguese, and doesn’t consider himself a proficient writer in that language. He also struggled with transferring Portuguese writing skills to English writing. Accordingly, he said that he doesn’t really enjoy writing in English, as starting a paper “is fun,” but “making changes isn’t.”

Brent’s survey responses are presented in Table 4. Because of his insignificant changes in attitude towards writing in general, Brent was asked to participate in an interview.

Table 4

*Brent’s Survey Responses: The Daly-Miller Test (positive and negative questions separated), the writing self-efficacy assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Index summed differences between the post- and pre-program surveys*

Instrument	Summed Difference
Daly-Miller (Positive)	-1
Daly-Miller (Negative)	-3
Self-efficacy Assessment	-10
Language Strategy Use Index	1

These survey responses revealed slightly negative trends, as Brent disagreed slightly more with the positive questions from the Daly-Miller Test (e.g. “writing is a lot of fun”) and agreed more with the negative questions (e.g. “my mind seems to go blank when I start writing”). His self-efficacy assessment responses also suggested that he felt less confident in his abilities to produce various aspects of the mechanics of writing (developing thesis and topic sentences, using vocabulary, etc.). Conversely, he reported using such strategies as (1) planning how to write academic papers in advance, (2) using circumlocution, and (3) using reference books more frequently, although he used strategies like (1) waiting to edit until all content is written and (2) revising writing once or twice to improve language and content slightly less frequently. Despite the more negative attitudes in Brent’s surveys, he did say that he had a positive experience with his Writing Fellow as he/she “help[ed] me to organize my ideas and grammar...and build a strong and clear thesis statement.”

For Brent, ELang 105 was hard in the beginning, even for the shorter, two page assignments. However, he did say it “got easier as it went.” He found the directive and foundational teaching to be the most useful aspects of the ELang 105 instruction. As he was shy in class, he didn’t ask many questions, but relied on his classmates to provide him with the necessary information to complete the assignment. Accordingly, he appreciated having a private tutor to help him with his writing. When asked about what prompted changes between drafts, Brent said that the Writing Fellow’s feedback was most helpful.

Brent mentioned that the instructor couldn’t always meet one-on-one with students, but the Fellow was paid to work with him, and thus could give “specific, individual feedback on how

to change it [the paper].” Brent valued the Fellow’s instructions on making a paragraph more clear (paragraph organization), eliminating run-on sentences, using “short, clear, brief sentences,” and using articles and transitions, each of which he plans to incorporate into future writing assignments. He did wish that he could have spent longer than 30 minutes with his Fellow, as they didn’t have “enough time to go deep,” and “she knew why [something was wrong] but didn’t have time to address [all issues].”

***Seth from Singapore: neutral views.*** Seth was a freshman accounting student from Singapore who had been in the United States since the start of the semester of this study in one of Teacher B’s sections. As a native of Singapore, Seth studied both Mandarin and English, and considers himself to be bilingual in both languages. He elected to take the ESL-sheltered freshman composition class as he hadn’t done any significant writing in English prior to matriculation, with his longest previous essay being about 1000 words, despite enjoying writing in English. He has had extensive experience writing in Mandarin in academic settings.

Seth was asked to participate in interviewing, as he saw slight gains in writing attitudes.

See Table 5 for the complete summed differences for the survey instruments.

Table 5

*Seth’s Survey Responses: The Daly-Miller Test (positive and negative questions separated), the writing self-efficacy assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Index summed differences between the post- and pre-program surveys*

Instrument	Summed Difference
Daly-Miller (Positive)	0
Daly-Miller (Negative)	0
Self-efficacy Assessment	55
Language Strategy Use Index	0

These results show little change in Seth’s attitudes toward writing over the course of the semester. Seth had a net change of zero for both the positive and negative Daly-Miller items, despite showing some slight variation in responses between the pre- and post-program surveys.

Seth did show some gains in the self-efficacy assessment, suggesting that he felt more confident in the mechanics of writing (putting together thesis and topic sentences, using vocabulary correctly, etc.). He also showed no change in the strategies he prefers using in the Language Strategy Use Index. Despite the lack of attitude change, Seth did respond that he had a largely positive experience with the Writing Fellows because they were “helpful and friendly,” reporting that they helped with “[t]opic sentences and how to be coherent in my writing.”

Despite his bilingual background, Seth found ELang 105 to be helpful, mainly for helping him develop “clarity and coherence.” He was a bit “puzzled” by the “focus on technique” in the class, and felt that it “dampens [his] creativity.” When asked what prompted change between drafts of his rhetorical analysis essay, he said that he “started out creatively, then switched” due to a closer reading of the rubric, driven by the want “to get a good grade.” Generally, ELang 105 was a helpful refresher course to get Seth back into academic writing from a four year military break.

When asked what was most useful about the ELang 105 instruction, Seth responded that the peer tutoring, from both the WF and the ESL Writing Lab, influenced his writing the most, followed by the individual feedback (conferencing and commenting) from the instructor. He appreciated the sense of continuity of having Fellow 2 assigned to work with him continuously. While the Fellowing was generally useful for him, he did note that the WF came off as being overly “concerned with time,” so he suspected that the responses from his Fellow were not as well thought out as they could have been.

While Seth didn’t have an ideal situation with his Fellow, he did find the rhetorical/organizational feedback from Fellow 2 to be helpful. Specifically, he appreciated the feedback encouraging him to be “systematic and clear” and to use “sign-posting.” Regarding

sentence-level issues, initially Seth said that he didn't really have any problems; upon probing a bit deeper, he said he received valuable feedback encouraging him to employ shorter sentences and avoid using "flowery language."

***Maria from Tahiti: largely positive views.*** Maria, a Tahitian junior in one of Teacher A's sections studying Spanish with future aims of pursuing a MPA, said that she plans on graduating in 2014. In preparing for her graduate studies, Maria took a lot of accounting and other business classes, and has not taken many writing intensive classes. She had been in the United States since either 2009 or 2010 (she couldn't quite remember), when she came to study with her husband. Previously, she had taken an ESL writing class, ESL 103, a class that she found to be less helpful than ELang 105. She had only one semester's experience writing in Tahiti; outside of that most of her academic writing has been in English. Maria stated that she does somewhat enjoy writing in English, and feels more confident in her abilities now.

Maria's survey responses are summed and presented in Table 6. Based on her strongly more positive attitudes towards writing as reflected in most of the instrument responses and her positive experience with the Writing Fellows, Maria was asked to participate in an interview.

Table 6

*Maria's Survey Responses: The Daly-Miller Test (positive and negative questions separated), the writing self-efficacy assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Index summed differences between the post- and pre-program surveys*

Instrument	Summed Difference
Daly-Miller (Positive)	13
Daly-Miller (Negative)	25
Self-efficacy Assessment	595
Language Strategy Use Index	7

Maria's survey responses showed a strong increase in positivity on the positive Daly-Miller items ("I look forward to writing down my ideas") and an even stronger decrease of negativity on the negative items ("I avoid writing"). She also felt much more confident in her abilities to

properly produce the mechanics of writing (developing thesis and topic sentences, using vocabulary, etc.) as seen from the increase in her self-efficacy assessment. Maria reported increased strategies usage of (1) trying to write various genres in English and (2) waiting to edit until all content is written, and decreased usage of (1) having native speakers read through the text and (2) revising once or twice to improve the language and content more. Maria also reported a positive experience with her Writing Fellow, saying the experience was “positive because she points out my mistakes, tells me why it is a mistake.”

Of ELang 105, Maria said that she appreciated the class discussion as the instructor was very aware of the needs of her ESL students, was a good resource for students, and generally provided good feedback. Referring to a specific assignment, she initially felt that the amount and quality of the analysis she gave was fine; upon meeting with her Writing Fellow, she learned that she should answer *why* and *how* particular features were used, and that this would help her develop deeper analysis. The instructor then looked at her essay and “said it was good,” but Maria ultimately received a poorer grade than expected. Accordingly, Maria noted that she experienced some frustration from class due to unclear teacher expectations.

Of the Fellowing, Maria appreciated that her Fellow “did what she could,” but would have valued receiving some more feedback. The Fellow provided more sentence-level grammar feedback than the teacher, which helped Maria, specifically with prepositions and articles. Maria said that she still thinks of the rules her Fellow taught her as she writes. She also valued the feedback from the Fellow on clarity, making stronger arguments, and how to avoid circular writing. At first, reading her paper out loud in a conference with other people in the room was “odd,” but she ended up really liking it. She did say that the Fellow was “too nice” at times. In

addition to the preposition and article usage taught, Maria said that she will apply the Fellow’s suggestions on paragraph organization and writing a clear, focused thesis.

***George from Hong Kong: largely positive views.*** George, in Teacher B’s group, had completed one term and one semester in the United States, and had not yet declared a major. Originally a Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong, George studied in Guanzhou, China, during high school, where he became proficient at Mandarin. He also studied English for five years while in China. He stated, “I have to like writing in English.” He elected to come to the United States to study as “English is the official language” and he will speak it more here than at home. He made sure to note that he hoped to improve his writing skills while in the U.S.

George was asked to participate in interviews due to his strongly positive responses in the surveys, the differences of which are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*George’s Survey Responses: The Daly-Miller Test (positive and negative questions separated), the writing self-efficacy assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Index summed differences between the post- and pre-program surveys*

Instrument	Summed Difference
Daly-Miller (Positive)	3
Daly-Miller (Negative)	3
Self-efficacy Assessment	75
Language Strategy Use Index	-3

George’s results reveal a generally positive trend in his attitude toward writing between the pre- and post-program survey instruments. From the Daly-Miller Test, he felt more positive about the positive questions (strongly agreeing with “I look forward to writing down my ideas”) and more negative about the negative questions (disagreeing with “I avoid writing”). His confidence in executing the mechanics of writing (developing thesis and topic sentences, using vocabulary, etc.) increased as well. However, he used some strategies less frequently: (1) planning out academic writing in advance, (2) writing different kinds of texts in English, (3) taking class notes in



English, and (4) using reference materials, although he did report using circumlocution more frequently. He also had a good experience with his Writing Fellow, stating that “she help[ed] me a lot. I learn[ed] a lot from her” like “how to organize my paper.”

Of ELang 105, George said the class was “exhausting,” as he needed to do writing assignments “right away.” Citations were challenging for him and the class instruction didn’t seem to really help. He needed to ask tutors to help him correct his citations. For the rhetorical analysis, George didn’t understand expectations at first, but was able to talk to the instructor and Writing Fellows tutors, and see sample papers, which helped him better comprehend the assignment. The teacher feedback and conferences were helpful to help him both understand expectations and improve his writing to meet those expectations (resulting in higher grades on assignments), and was the aspect of ELang 105 that he found most useful.

Of the tutoring experience, George said it was a “very good” experience, as he appreciated the one-on-one attention, the time spent with him, and the patience exhibited as he tried to improve various aspects of writing. Specifically, George’s Fellow provided needed clarification on the assignment, organizational expectations (including how to form topic sentences and organize a paragraph), and how to develop proper analysis. Regarding sentence level issues, he found “general information” to be useful. He noted that the Writing Fellows “helped us think more specific [sic] about thesis statements,” referring to choosing a properly narrow topic to focus on. Feedback from his Fellow that George plans on incorporating in future writing assignments include suggestions on making the essay’s organization “easy to follow,” and how to formulate thesis statements. The Fellow also provided input that prompted George to alter the order of body paragraphs for his research paper and addressed some holes in his argument. George’s sole complaint about the Writing Fellows tutoring was that it wasn’t enough;

he would have liked to have had three conferences for each assignment: one covering content and ideas, one on organization, and one on grammar. For George, the professor conference was most valuable as she “gives grades,” with the WF tutoring next.

**Student interview discussion.** One of the students selected to interview felt that her Fellow didn’t provide as much useful feedback as would have been ideal, specifically referring to organization or rhetorical feedback. However, this negative view was not standard, as the other four interview participants all reported having a good experience with their Fellows and appreciated the private tutoring. In response to the first research question addressing student perceptions, these interview data indicate that ESL students perceive an ESL-focused Writing Fellows program to be successful at supporting their freshman composition courses.

Regarding the second research question addressing student responses, the students interviewed specifically mentioned appreciating feedback on content, rhetorical structure/organization, and grammar, and the opportunity to clarify and negotiate intended meaning in follow-up conferences with the Fellow. One interview participant reported that he also appreciated the information from the Writing Fellow clarifying the assignment expectations. Based on interview data, Fellows also should take care to be consistent with other Fellows of a specific section when giving feedback, scheduling conferences, and using handouts as students frequently share experiences with each other, which may result in some students feeling that they didn’t receive the help from the Fellow that they could have. Fellows should also take care to provide plenty of directive, constructive feedback. Despite these suggestions, the interview data suggest that students overall responded very well to the WF tutoring, providing that the tutor was proactive in preparing for conferences with the student. Themes drawn from these interview data are presented and discussed further, later in this chapter.

**Student focus groups.** In addition to the pre- and post-program surveys and the interviews, focus groups were held the last day of class in each of the classrooms at the time the class was scheduled. Accordingly, nearly all 54 participants were actively involved in the focus groups, although a few were absent from class and several were late. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the larger classes were split into two individual focus groups, or between five and eight participants each (per Marshall & Rossman, 1995), while the smaller classes were not split. This resulted in a total of eight focus groups being held. Similar to the interviews, the focus groups started off asking broad questions before focusing on the tutoring, to avoid leading the students.

Data from the focus groups are presented in this section. To keep this section concise, data from all focus groups are presented together. While this arguably may result in lost data as the reader may not be given a clear picture of repeated topics or themes, the sheer mass of data didn't feasibly allow an all-encompassing presentation of data from all focus groups. In order to provide an appropriate breadth of data, themes are listed and include a frequency count, in the next section. Data from the focus groups are grouped and presented in the following order: perceptions of the ELang 105 class in general, positive experiences with ESL Writing Fellows, negative experiences with ESL WFs, and suggestions for the ESL WFs program.

***Perceptions of the ELang 105 class.*** When asked what most influenced writing in ELang 105, students from several focus groups found the basic instruction of the class to be most helpful, as the teacher discussed "basic writing processes and rules." The teacher created a "safe environment" and helped "make sure we [the students] understand." One participant noted "I already took a writing class before, but I thought that this one was better because she...showed us step by step how to write. She really explained very well. We had tons of drafts to do and tons of time, like for the research paper and she was there with us every step of the way." Attending

class was helpful to other participants because “you get to know the professor and what she likes and doesn’t like.” It was also helpful to meet with the instructor because “she’s the teacher and she knows how to help me improve my paper. She grades it.” Others appreciated the teacher preparation and felt that the sheltered instruction provided them with the resources and schema to “write better in other classes.”

When asked about what resources were available to them as ELang students, participants noted the ESL writing lab, their individual Writing Fellow, their teacher, the university writing center, the library, Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab, and classmates. Of these resources, the teacher was generally the most helpful to most participants, as she “knows what she wants from us” and “explain[ed] better.” Participants of several other focus groups volunteered that the most helpful resource was the feedback the Fellows provided encouraging revision.

In terms of criticizing the ELang 105 instruction, a few of the participants of several focus groups indicated that the instructor was “busy” at times and couldn’t give the students the “attention [they] needed.” Teacher office hours weren’t always convenient for students (echoed by participants in many focus groups), due to conflicting classes. Participants of several groups noted that the teacher “just gave feedback” but didn’t follow up or provide the explanation needed to clarify or help him with the paper. This perception was generally followed by a remark supporting the role of WFs in providing specific feedback coupled with time spent explaining and working through issues with students.

One participant said that the conferences with the WFs “were more helpful than [those with] the teacher, because [they] could sit and spend time” with the student. Several others felt that the conferences and feedback from the Writing Fellows were more helpful than any other aspect of the class. Another commented that the teacher and the WFs were “both about equally

first” as a helpful resource to them. One student remarked that she “felt like [she] was able to think like an English speaker” more due to the individual feedback. The participants of one focus group unanimously felt that the WFs were more useful than the ESL Writing Lab tutors, as the “Fellows were more familiar with the assignment.”

***Positive ESL Writing Fellows experiences.*** Regarding their experiences working with a Writing Fellow, the participants of seven of the eight focus groups had largely good things to report, specifically on receiving feedback on content/global organization and grammatical issues, and generally felt that having a WF improved their writing. For example, one participant appreciated having an experienced writer provide suggestions that were personalized to that student. “She would go over everything: main ideas, organization, everything from the start and grammar at the end.”

One participant gave the ESL WFs program “ten [points] out of ten,” due to the “very encouraging comments” and said that the Fellow was “willing to provide extra help.” Another participant commented on the time the Fellow spent as she “gave feedback,” and was “never impatient.” And a third said the Fellow “saw points of what [we] struggled [with] and helped with those,” to which several other students emphatically agreed. One participant said that the Fellow would “tell [the student] what was wrong, help [him/her] fix one, then let [the student] fix the rest.” Other participants of various focus groups really liked working with the Fellows, with one participant stating that they “had a conversation about the topic,” not just being directed what to write about. Another noted that the Fellow “spent time reading,” while another said that the Fellow “didn’t give vague feedback.”

One participant of a different focus group said his Fellow was “beyond incredible” as she was “very approachable because she’s a student like us, but clear.” He wished his time with her

could have been longer. He also noted that, after meeting with his Fellow, he would “have to go to the ESL writing lab and work with other tutors, but they didn’t know my paper like [my Fellow] did.” These views were echoed by another participant, who had the same Fellow assigned to her. Another student “felt lost on the first paper” that the Fellow didn’t help out with, but once she had a Fellow to rely on, she had “more direction” and could “email the Writing Fellow regularly.” Specifically, most of the participants expressed appreciation of the comments and feedback from the Fellow, because, as one said, “she always gave an explanation of why she says something. I feel that I can argue with her about it, too—there was a lot of communication.” One participant appreciated that the Fellow was “willing to change her time when we don’t have the right time.” Another said “she gave me a lot of resources, for example transition words. I just felt cared [for]; she really cared for me and wanted to help me.” This suggests that the Fellows helped the students apply content from classroom lectures and provided the support needed for the participants to take risks in writing on their own.

The majority of the participants from seven of the focus groups agreed that the marginal comments were very helpful when addressing content and rhetorical structure issues. Some participants liked that the Fellows pointed out areas that weren’t clear to the reader. One said “I didn’t realize that they weren’t clear before, but she [the Fellow] helped me realize it.” Other participants appreciated that the Fellows would also point out areas where more supporting evidence is needed, and would make sure that they provide feedback that helps students “see what was good” in their writing as well, giving “compliment[s] on the good parts of [their] writing.” They noted that the “comments were helpful,” and brought up topics such as focusing/narrowing the topic, looking at concluding sentences, working on the flow of the paper, and helping with paragraph organization. One participant appreciated the help on her thesis that

the Fellow provided, as the Fellow “had me sit down and write my thesis statement, two or three thesis statements. Even though I hated it at the time, she helped *me* [stress original] write—she didn’t write it for me.” Similar activities done in the conference were remarked on by other participants, reinforcing that activities in conferences are helpful at teaching or practicing difficult concepts with the students. Another participant appreciated the tips on paragraph writing from her Fellow. “Now I think about her advice every time I write a paragraph.”

The vast majority of the participants from all eight focus groups found the grammar tutoring to be helpful, specifically looking at pronoun referents and word choice. One mentioned that the Fellow was “good [at] identification of major grammar issues” and focusing on those, suggesting that the Fellow prioritized the grammar error patterns. One participant noted that the grammar conferences “felt a little forced, but they were still useful,” as the Fellows were “able to explain [the] instructor’s marks.” This suggests that the Fellows were working closely with the instructor to explain feedback and help the students match teacher expectations. Another participant said that the Fellow was “good at pointing mistakes and explaining why it needed to be changed.” Yet another participant said that her Fellow wanted her to read the paper aloud and “this helped me see the grammar errors and flow. So that is a good strategy.”

Despite some minor issues, most the focus groups participants emphatically agreed that having a WF helped them improve their writing in English. One commented that the instruction on paragraph organization helped a lot. One said that their understanding of how to develop a thesis was “stronger.” Another mentioned that the review from an “experienced tutor” helped him understand the “reader’s perspective” better. Another participant said that having a Fellow “made [the] writing process more enjoyable,” and several others agreed with this comment.

Additionally, most participants felt that the experience of having had a Writing Fellow would help them in future semesters as they helped emphasize “the pre-writing process [and] drafting.”

While they felt that the instructor was very helpful for them, the participants of one focus group almost unanimously felt that the Writing Fellows were even more helpful. All participants agreed that the Fellow provided helpful grammar feedback. The participants of another group mentioned that they appreciated the feedback on the specific logistics of using Microsoft Word and proper formatting for an American academic audience, suggesting that the Fellows were addressing other student concerns, not just those directed by the priorities taught.

The participants of one focus group had mixed feeling about the ESL Writing Fellows. One participant volunteered that the Fellowing was “not very helpful. Some parts yeah, and some parts no. Some feedback was not that good for me. It wouldn’t change the class for me if I didn’t have a Writing Fellow” However, another participant countered and said, “for me it was the opposite. She [the Fellow] was willing to meet and help me out any time and gave me really good feedback. She helped interpret the teacher’s comments. I love the idea of peer tutors.”

***Negative ESL Writing Fellows experiences.*** Five of the seven participants of one focus group had a negative experience with their ESL WF, and noted those bad experiences rather emphatically. This focus group was the only one of the eight to have a majority of participants who reported a largely negative experience with their Fellow. They also noted that the instructor and Fellows were not always giving the same kind of feedback and that their opinions differed on what the students should do to improve their papers. One said that “they [Fellows] can help only to a certain extent. The professor knows because she’s grading some things” to which another participant said “I don’t care what the reader thinks—I care about the grade.” Another said “you learn to give people what they want—I know my audience (my teacher), and I give her



what she wants.” In general, some participants seemed to appreciate directive comments, primarily from their teacher.

One student said that he sent the research paper in late, so he didn’t blame the Fellow for not reading the paper before the conference. Another participant commented that, while his Fellow was very reliable and responsible and “tried to initiate conferences with her students,” she didn’t “go the extra mile—she just stuck [sic] to what she had to do. If you wanted anything more, she would oblige, but time would be very limited. After a while I just felt like she was my spell checker so I stopped going.”

Several participants noted that the WF feedback was “confusing when it conflicted with feedback from the professor.” This was true for quite a few participants, who, in these situations, said that the Fellows would usually tell the students to “follow and please the teacher first” as she gives the grade. However, other participants disagreed, as one commented that she didn’t “have many problems [with the Fellow]” as his feedback “aligned well with what [the teacher] said.” Another participant agreed with this perspective for his tutoring experience. And one participant felt that the Fellowing wasn’t “very helpful because I usually already know what I need to work on and...got feedback about the same things I was already thinking about,” so she “[d]idn’t feel that it was worthwhile” to meet with the Fellow. Other participants felt that the feedback from the Fellow was focused primarily on the assignment for ELang 105, and couldn’t see how to apply suggestions to papers for other classes or future assignments.

When asked what was least helpful about having a Writing Fellow, a different participant said that, were the conferences with the WF any longer, it “would have felt like a waste of time.” Another participant commented “when she [the Fellow] told me my paper was not good and I have to write it again, that was not very helpful because I have to write it again?” The facilitator

then asked this student if rewriting helped, and the student responded, “depends on the grade.” Another commonly expressed issue was due to conflicting tutor/student schedules. Conferencing with Fellows wasn’t always simple to arrange.

***Suggestions for the ESL Writing Fellows Program.*** While most focus group participants were pleased with the peer tutoring, they did note that the Fellow sometimes didn’t seem to read the papers very carefully, wasn’t “honest with criticism” or specific or directive enough in his/her comments. Several participants noted that, while the Fellows “[t]ried to be nice by giving nice comments” they wanted “more helpful, harsh feedback.” One of the Fellows didn’t comment that one student was writing her paper on the wrong topic. One participant noted that “getting comments wasn’t as helpful as the conferences themselves” and wished they could have conferenced more often. Other participants wanted their Fellows to “get to the point faster— [saying] do this, do that, with reason why” to maximize the students’ time spent with the tutors.

One student felt like he was “at a disadvantage” as the other students seemed to have more feedback from their tutors. Sometimes the Fellows seemed to just be “doing their jobs [and] didn’t show as much interest in students” as they should have. One participant suggested that the students should be able to choose the Fellow they want to work with, as this will help students “get the best match.” These comments suggest that the Fellows need to be consistent with the feedback they give students within a class, and that they shouldn’t worry about being too harsh with their feedback for students. Similar themes were reiterated in several focus groups. However, the participants generally did feel that having the private tutors were “definitely better than not having a Writing Fellow,” especially for longer papers for which the teacher didn’t have the time to properly work with individuals one-on-one.

**Student focus group discussion.** In response to the research question investigating student perceptions, the researcher noted that participants of all the focus groups mentioned that they found the help from the Fellows to be useful to some extent. Some participants didn't receive the help necessary on rhetorical or organizational issues, but all found the grammar assistance to be valuable.

To answer the second research question investigating the response of students to the Fellows program as it was implemented in freshman writing classes, participants from each of the focus groups generally responded favorably to the ESL WFs processes. Several focus groups made sure to mention that they also appreciated the feedback encouraging clarity, and two focus group participants emphasized that they appreciated the Fellow helping students negotiate meaning. This is a key point of the Writing Fellows model, which suggests that students may learn more effectively when they feel free to explain and negotiate intended meaning with a tutor, as this helps develop a student's schema and situational knowledge of rhetorical structures and writing expectations. Accordingly, the participant perceptions indicate that the ESL Writing Fellows program may be effectively accomplishing this aim.

Seven of the eight focus groups reported that the Fellows provided valuable feedback and/or used activities in conferences that help students master organizational concepts. Several participants also mentioned that the Fellow showed knowledge of contrastive rhetoric that helped the students better articulate the differences in cultural writing expectations. This feedback suggests that ESL students perceive that the ESL Writing Fellows program is supporting and helping them to better comprehend and match institutional and teacher writing expectations.

The majority of the participants of each of the focus groups found the grammar tutoring helpful, even those who otherwise did not have a good WFs experience. This may be not

surprising when one considers that ESL students often seek out grammar help above all else and may consider good writing to be nothing more than mastery of the sentence-level features of English (Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010). However, as the traditional WFs model doesn't significantly support grammar issues, the adaptation of the ESL WFs program to include linguistic and grammatical conferences seems to be well received by the target students.

The focus group participant responses indicated that the students perceive that the ESL Writing Fellows program assisted them in their freshman writing classes by providing helpful feedback on writing topics such as (1) grammar and linguistic features, (2) organization and rhetorical structures, and (3) content. The participants appreciated both the feedback and the conference time spent with the Fellows. The program, while not perfect, did seem to provide valuable assistance to the students. This suggests that an ESL Writing Fellows program may be helpful, given a sufficiently large ESL student population to justify the potential expense. See the themes for additional discussion.

### **Teacher Interviews**

The researcher met with both Teacher A and Teacher B at various times over the course of the semester regarding the integration of Writing Fellows in their classes. The first meeting occurred before the semester began, when the researcher met with the teachers to discuss expectations, like how to schedule the time needed for the Fellows to respond and conference with the students, and how to ensure Fellows provide feedback that matches teacher expectations. Regular informal meetings were held throughout the semester to see how the Fellowship was going. A final, non-structured interview was held near the end of the semester with each teacher. The content from those interviews are presented and analyzed below.

**Teacher A.** Teacher A taught the two largest sections of ELang 105. She typically had a fairly laid back approach to working with the Writing Fellows. At the beginning of the semester, the researcher helped her understand how to incorporate the Fellows into her schedule and classroom. She was very receptive to the program and was excited to have the extra help.

At the end-of-semester interview, Teacher A noted that the Writing Fellows were generally very helpful in providing individualized feedback to each of her students, and felt that they took some of the burden of helping students progress as they could meet with students for longer periods of time than she could. She did note that the quantity and quality of feedback varied greatly depending on the Fellow, and suggested that the Fellows should be monitored more closely to standardize responses more. She mentioned that the ESL students of her class were very likely to compare notes on the comments from their respective Fellows, and those students who came up short would complain to her that they weren't getting needed assistance.

Teacher A was the instructor for the focus group that had the worst experience with Writing Fellows of any of the groups. Teacher A confirmed that one of the Fellows was not on top of the responses like he/she should have been, and had "technical difficulties" which prevented sending feedback to the students on time. While the technical issues were genuine, Teacher A commented that the Fellow should have been more proactive in contacting the students and the teacher to alert them of the issues. Additionally, had the Fellow been more prepared and spent time responding to the student papers before the final deadline, this entire situation may have been averted.

**Teacher B.** Teacher B taught the three smaller sections of ELang 105. She typically had a very hands-on approach to teaching and was more controlling of her classroom than Teacher A. While initially somewhat reserved about including Writing Fellows tutoring in her classroom,

she quickly became convinced of the value of the program because she “saw the potential value of having private tutors in a sheltered ESL freshman composition course.”

While no larger crises occurred in Teacher B’s sections, Teacher B also noted that the quantity and quality of feedback varied greatly depending on the Fellow and encouraged measures to keep standards high. Teacher B had her Fellows include her on all correspondence between the Fellows and their students, including copies of the emailed responses. However, due to her schedule, she was not able to review all comments from Fellows promptly.

Teacher B also commented that some Fellows would miss glaring issues in the papers they reviewed, such as the topic not matching the assignment guidelines. She suggested that perhaps the teacher should be responsible for looking at a first draft, or at least a topic and/or thesis, then approving that topic before a draft is written and passed on to the Fellow. Other comments and perspective of this teacher matched those of Teacher A.

**Teacher interview discussion.** To answer the third research question investigating the writing instructors’ perceptions of the ESL Writing Fellows program, both Teacher A and Teacher B felt that the ESL Writing Fellows program generally helped provide students with support in writing, although the quantity and quality of feedback varied from Fellow to Fellow. Teachers noted that some Fellows missed important issues that should have been addressed early on in the writing process, and suggested that closer monitoring might help this issue. One teacher also had to deal with the issues with one of the Fellows neglecting responsibilities. These circumstances should be avoided when possible, as Fellows should be prompt in responding and proactive in communicating potential issues with the instructor.

Despite the weaknesses outlined above, both teachers agreed that the ESL Writing Fellows program provided students with personalized feedback that the teachers themselves

simply didn't have the time to give to each student, and concluded that the ESL Writing Fellows program was a helpful addition to the sheltered freshman composition courses. Further discussion on themes drawn from instructor interviews is found later in this chapter.

### **ESL Writing Fellows Interviews**

In addition to gathering information from the student and teacher participants, the researcher conducted non-structured interviews with the ESL Writing Fellows to balance the students' comments with the Fellows' perspectives. All Fellows perspectives are presented together.

The Fellows appreciated being paid to work as an intern, which doesn't happen in most other possible internships in the area. They also valued the chance to work closely with experienced L2 writing teachers, and felt that this prepared them to teach L2 writing in ways that the TESOL minor classroom instruction did not. They also enjoyed working with ESL students.

While the Fellows reported that they generally felt properly trained to work with L2 writers, they did note some weaknesses in their training. Several mentioned that they weren't sure where to draw the line when providing additional feedback and conferences over those required by the program. One noted that "I'm fine meeting with a student as often as they need, but I want them to become autonomous as well. I don't want to become a crutch for them to rely on." Several tutors felt unprepared to help students with grammar issues, feeling that they "couldn't explain the rules adequately" and didn't want to "just say 'that's the way we say it.'" Other tutors reported that they struggled with providing clear, directive feedback while helping students maintain ownership over their own papers. Another common issue was how to write a cover letter that would be accessible to the ESL audience, but still cover the necessary global

issues. Fellows also unanimously mentioned that additional resources such as activities-focused handouts that would address various L2 writing issues would be useful for conferences.

**Writing Fellows interview discussion.** The ESL Writing Fellows themselves provided feedback regarding their experiences with the students they work with that help answer the third research question investigating Fellows' perceptions of the program. While Fellows felt fairly prepared to work with L2 writers from the training class, additional instruction on helping ESL students with various grammar techniques would have been appreciated. Others reported that they struggled with providing clear and directive feedback while still helping the students retain ownership over the paper. Encouraging self-regulated learning was also an issue for some Fellows, as they weren't sure how directive they should be when providing feedback, particularly when dealing with grammatical issues. Fellows accordingly need guidance and practice to help them provide useful feedback without taking control of student essays themselves. Despite some issues, the Fellows perceived the program to be successful. As with the other instruments, themes drawn from interviews with Fellows are identified and discussed in the next section.

### **ESL Writing Fellows Themes**

Themes taken from the focus group data and student, teacher, and Writing Fellow interviews are listed in Table 8. Themes are grouped and analyzed according to the following topics: general ESL WF approaches to tutoring, approaches to commenting, and approaches to conferencing. Within each grouping, themes are ordered by the frequency that they appeared in focus group and interview discussions, both in Table 9 and the following discussion.



Table 8

*Themes Drawn from the Interviews and Focus Groups: Themes are grouped, and a frequency count based on focus groups (on the left) and interviews (on the right) is given, out of eight possible focus groups and five possible interviews.*

#	Theme	Frequency Focus Group/Interview
<b>General themes on Writing Fellows approaches to ESL tutoring</b>		
1	Fellows need to work closely with class instructors.	8/5
2	Fellows need to be proactive.	5/4
3	Fellows should respond as readers to point out unclear areas in student writing.	5/2
4	Fellows must be fully invested in their jobs.	4/2
5	As peers, Fellows may be more accessible than teachers often may be.	4/0
6	Students should feel comfortable initiating contact with their Fellows and asking questions on various topics.	3/1
7	Fellows should spend extra time and energy on helping with perceived weaknesses.	2/1
8	Fellows should encourage students to negotiate intended meaning/content.	2/0
9	Some students may not perceive that they receive any help from their Fellow.	1/2
<b>Themes on ESL Writing Fellows approaches to providing feedback</b>		
10	Fellows can help students with content, organization, and grammatical issues.	8/5
11	Fellows should provide constructive, not just complimentary, feedback.	7/5
12	Fellows need to properly understand instructor priorities so they can provide matching feedback.	7/5
13	Fellows need to give the students the individualized feedback they need to improve.	5/5
14	Specific and clear feedback helps students implement that feedback in their own writing.	5/4
15	ESL students may not effectively use the response letters traditionally written by WFs.	2/0
16	Fellows should provide authentic compliments to reinforce strengths in student writing.	1/1
17	Fellows should focus on consistent grammar patterns of error first.	1/0
<b>Themes on ESL Writing Fellows approaches to conferencing</b>		
18	Quality conference time is valuable to ESL students.	7/5
19	Conferences may be an effective way of providing scaffolded instruction.	5/3
20	Fellows need to be as flexible as possible when meeting with students to reduce the logistical burden of the extra steps of conferencing with a tutor.	4/4
21	If Fellows meet with students outside of the expected/required conference, students develop more of an authentic relationship with their Fellows.	5/2
23	In-conference activities to practice difficult concepts may be a productive use of conference time.	3/2
23	Fellows should teach principles, but also let the students produce writing on their own in a safe conference environment.	2/0
24	Students don't like needing to rewrite their entire paper due to inappropriate topic choice.	1/0

**General ESL WF approaches to tutoring.** The following themes address topics related to ESL Writing Fellows' approaches to tutoring:

***Theme 1: Fellows need to work closely with class instructors.*** This theme is more than just responding according to the priorities established by the teacher. Fellows are more effective peer tutors when they work closely with the instructors of the class they are Fellowing, as students need consistency. Effective WFs act as extensions of the teacher; they are familiar with available resources, the content of the class that has been taught previously, and any and all handouts/assignment description that the instructor uses. Effective Fellows not only are familiar with said resources, but they refer directly to them when working with students. This creates a sense of consistency between the instructor and the Fellow. Administratively, Fellows should be encouraged or required to read through the class syllabus and handouts to be effective tutors.

***Theme 2: Fellows need to be proactive.*** Writing Fellows need to be proactive in contacting their students, and communicate well with the instructor about feedback expectations. While this theme may be obvious, it does entail some administrative concerns. ESL WF program administrators should consider potential WFs' proactive abilities when selecting future Fellows and stress the need to reach out to students early on in the semester to offer assistance.

Additionally, Fellows need to proactively communicate with the instructor of the class they are Fellowing about expectations for student writing or questions they may have. This will allow Fellows to prioritize feedback on those issues that the teacher values most and/or has presented in class up to the point of the Fellows intervention. Again, administration should encourage open communication between Fellows and teachers early in the semester, and Fellows should feel free to ask any and all questions about the assignments and priorities of the teacher. For larger groups of Fellows in larger classes, this may need to take place via a Senior Fellow, a

more experienced Fellow who helps new Fellows and works closely with the instructor of the assigned class, per the traditional WFs program. Administration should then follow up with teachers regularly to ensure that Fellows maintain high standards of responding, and be prepared to intervene throughout the semester should issues be discovered.

***Theme 3: Fellows should respond as readers to point out unclear areas in student writing.*** This theme appears to be an important aspect of having a peer tutor work with ESL students, as Fellows can help students understand the nuances of various synonyms and develop cohesion, per the guidelines of Ferris (2009). Given language limitations, L2 writers simply may not be aware that a particular phrase or sentence is unclear to native English-speaking readers, unless someone points out the unclear instances to the student. These instances may be frequent, which may result in addressing all such instances unrealistic for the busy writing teacher. However, peer tutors may have the time available to meet those needs. Administrators should teach time management strategies to Fellows, and help them understand which aspects of writing to focus on first when responding. The priorities given in Chapter 3 may serve as an initial guideline for tutors.

***Theme 4: Fellows must be fully invested in their jobs.*** This theme suggests that Fellows must be responsible and thorough in completing their duties. In order to be effective peer tutors, Fellows need to take time to formulate thorough and clear responses, and conference regularly with their students. Again, administrators should consider applicants' responsibility when hiring new ESL Fellows, as much of the perceived success of an ESL Writing Fellows program relies on the individual tutors. When training and managing WFs programs, administrators should take time to stress the importance of giving proper feedback to ESL students. Enough funding should

be secured so Fellows can take the time needed to respond clearly and completely without feeling rushed by program policies.

On a related note, while crises may (and are likely) to occasionally occur, Fellows should take the responsibility to contact both the instructor and the students they are working with well in advance so appropriate steps can be taken. This issue was brought up by the teachers and mentioned by the students of several focus groups, mainly those of the students who had the Fellow who did not properly portray the WFs program. Circumstances may arise that require a Fellow to neglect duties. Responsible Fellows should take steps to avoid such circumstances, such as planning response time in advance. This will afford Fellows with leeway when returning responses, and provide Fellows with a buffer in case such circumstances become an issue. By planning ahead, Fellows can prioritize Fellowing duties. Administration should encourage Fellows to do so, and build a system of checking up on Fellows regularly into the program.

***Theme 5: As peers, Fellows may be more accessible than teachers often may be.*** Due to the (possibly only perceived) busy schedules of teachers, students may feel that approaching teachers to ask for assistance outside of class may be an imposition. However, students may feel comfortable meeting with tutors because they are peers, which supports the role of peer tutoring according to Soven (2006). Administrators should encourage Fellows to make themselves accessible to students. Training sessions on working with students of various personality types and cultural origins may prove helpful in doing so.

***Theme 6: Students should feel comfortable initiating contact with their Fellows and asking questions on various topics.*** This theme deals with the motivation of students as individuals, and may be rather obvious at first. However, just as motivation contributes to successful learning, Fellows, writing teachers, and ESL WFs program administrators need to be

aware of potential ways to encourage students to become invested in the WFs program and take advantage of the proffered assistance. The Fellowing process likely is more effective when students are invested; students should feel comfortable initiating contact with their Fellow and asking questions on various issues. In order for them to feel comfortable with their tutors, Fellows should reach out to their students early in the semester and offer to help with prewriting. Fellows should also make sure to go to the class to introduce themselves well before the assignment due date, so students feel more comfortable contacting them for help. Teachers should make the WFs processes salient to students in class and provide Fellows' contact information on syllabi when appropriate. And WFs program administrators should encourage the above actions in the Fellows and instructors to help them understand expectations and the underlying reasons for these actions.

***Theme 7: Fellows should spend extra time and energy on helping with perceived weaknesses.*** Several students noted that they appreciated the time spent one-on-one with their Fellows, which aligns with the traditional WFs model. As such, the Writing Fellow can be just as powerful an instrument of change to help students with their writing as the writing teacher, especially if the Fellow spends extra time and energy on helping the student with weaknesses as perceived by either the Fellow or the student.

Related to this idea, working with a peer tutor may allow students to respond more naturally than they can when interacting with a teacher. The extra time a tutor spends with a student appears to help that student better understand various aspects of writing. The accessible tutor guides the student through the unfamiliar disciplines of academic writing in American university settings, from a closer perspective than that of a teacher. Administrators should take steps to encourage this type of behavior from their tutors, and could model effective conferences

and responses in training meetings. They can also teach effective time management strategies and goal keeping designed to help Fellows progress as tutors.

***Theme 8: Fellows should encourage students to negotiate intended meaning/content.***

This theme aligns with the traditional WFs model, which emphasizes the peer portion of the peer-tutor. Students rarely feel comfortable negotiating issues with a teacher, as the teacher is perceived to always be right because he/she ultimately assigns the grade. Conversely, with a peer tutor, students may feel more comfortable negotiating content or organization as no grade is assigned by the tutor. This negotiation may help students better understand the writing process as it relates to idea development, and is commonly used by more experienced writers (DeCiccio, 1989). Accordingly, building this schema may be an effective way of helping ESL writers become more proficient L2 writers as it pertains to content. Administrators should encourage Fellows to ask probing questions to help their students talk through idea development. Training sessions practicing these principles should be given regularly. Fellows should also clearly understand their role in helping students understand negotiation and idea development.

***Theme 9: Some students may not perceive that they receive any help from their Fellow.***

This theme is commonly seen in the traditional WFs program, although to a lesser degree in the ESL branch, as most ESL students were very receptive to the extra guidance from the Fellows. However, it is still an important issue to consider. Some students may not perceive that they receive any help because they start out at fairly high levels, so tutors need to be prepared to work with more proficient writers. ESL WFs need to be trained to respond properly to writing of students of all proficiency levels. Fellows need to have strategies and activities prepared to help advanced or proficient writers to become even better, addressing small, local issues as appropriate. Administration should provide training to help tutors with these issues.

**ESL WF approaches to commenting.** The following themes address topics related to ESL Writing Fellows' approaches to commenting:

***Theme 10: Fellows can help students with content, organization, and grammatical issues.*** L2 writers need assistance with content, rhetorical structures/organization, and grammar, and they simply don't get the linguistic help they need in many other organizations on campus. Much has been said in this thesis about the help that ESL Fellows can provide when properly trained; suffice this addition to note that administrators need to be prepared to train tutors to respond appropriately in each of the above categories. Clear, specific activities and responding strategies need to be explicitly taught to ESL Writing Fellows.

***Theme 11: Fellows should provide constructive, not just complimentary, feedback.*** ESL Fellows themselves weren't sure how to balance constructive and complimentary comments, which is a common issue in the traditional WFs program as well. In the traditional program, Fellows are encouraged to make one of every three comments a specific, genuine compliment. In the ESL branch, the researcher encouraged ESL Fellows to make one of every five comments a specific, genuine compliment, as well as address inconsistent issues (per the adapted WFs priorities as outlined in Chapter 3). However, little was done to verify that the Fellows were following these guidelines outside of the training meetings held according to the schedule given in Chapter 3. Accordingly, additional training sessions with an emphasis on providing constructive feedback to students may provide tutors with helpful feedback. Having tutors set specific, measurable goals on feedback and following up with the success these goals may be an additional method of ensuring constructive feedback.

***Theme 12: Fellows need to properly understand instructor priorities so they can provide matching feedback.*** This theme was addressed somewhat via earlier themes, but is very

important as it came up at both the student and instructor level so it warrants further attention. Many students commented that the Fellow and teacher occasionally gave conflicting information. Fellows need to communicate well with instructors so they provide feedback that matches that of the instructor. This will provide consistency to the students, and help them improve the issues emphasized by the instructor, and thus may help prevent students from feeling overwhelmed by a large to-fix list of content, organization, and grammatical issues. In addition to open communication at the beginning of the semester, the instructor can hold regular calibration meetings during the semester with the Fellows in his/her class in which the Fellows can practice responding to a sample paper and then discuss which issues should take priority and why in a group setting. This negotiation should help ensure that Fellows and teachers are on the same page. Administration can require or encourage such calibration meetings, and work with the teacher to formulate and articulate clear expectations for the benefit of the Fellows.

***Theme 13: Fellows need to give students the individualized feedback they need to improve.*** Fellows need to provide specific, individualized feedback to students so they have the resources they need to improve. While the program as it existed during the semester of this study met student expectations generally, some students didn't feel that they received enough feedback to address all relevant issues in their papers. Consistency of feedback between Fellows was also an issue. Administrators should regularly review Fellows' feedback and provide suggestions on both quantity and quality of the feedback.

***Theme 14: Specific and clear feedback helps students implement that feedback in their own writing.*** This critical theme is touched upon by earlier themes, but deserves some additional attention. While the earlier themes addressed the need to be specific, feedback also needs to be framed in such a way as to be a "teaching moment," by which the researcher means that Fellows



need to make sure to provide enough information to establish a student's schema. The more specific and clear feedback from a Fellow is, the easier it is for students to understand which issues need to be addressed. Necessary information consists of *what* students should do to fix the issue at hand, *how* to fix it, and *why* it should be addressed. For this last point, Fellows typically should respond as a reader to explain how fixing a particular issue (organizational or grammatical in nature) will help the audience. However, Fellows need to take care that such feedback remains short and clear enough to be accessible for ESL students who may not have a high mastery of the English language. Accordingly, instruction and training from administration would help Fellows improve their comments.

***Theme 15: ESL students may not effectively use the response letters traditionally written by WFs.*** Several students noted that they didn't really read the response letters, relying instead on the marginal comments to make adjustments to their papers. While the original ESL WFs program stipulated that Fellows would write shorter, easily-to-scan response letters, even this may be unnecessary. This requirement may need to be altered to better meet ESL student needs. Further consideration and/or research may provide additional insights into this theme.

***Theme 16: Fellows should provide authentic compliments to reinforce strengths in student writing.*** In contrast with Theme 11, this theme suggests that students may respond well to the occasional authentic compliment. Students may respond better when constructive feedback is tempered by genuine compliments, per the guidelines established earlier. Accordingly, both constructive and complimentary feedback is important to help students feel at ease and receptive to instruction. Administrators should keep feedback following those guidelines, and provide appropriate training to reinforce these principles.

***Theme 17: Fellows should focus on consistent grammar patterns of error first.*** This theme follows the ESL-adjusted priorities as outlined in Chapter 3. When identifying grammatical principles to work on with the student, Fellows should focus on regular grammar patterns of error first. Students noticed that the Fellows knew which grammar features to focus on and prepared instruction accordingly. Via this approach, Fellows may use time effectively while addressing the most critical grammatical features.

Administration should accordingly encourage ESL Fellows to identify patterns and provide training sessions for them to practice. Fellows should also have a variety of resources available to help them tutor effectively. These resources could include handouts with activities to practice a variety of grammatical features, and online pedagogical applications such as [azargrammar.com](http://azargrammar.com) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Fellows should be encouraged to spend time investigating these resources so they feel comfortable using them. This time should be paid by the program so Fellows make developing a working knowledge of these resources a priority.

**ESL WF approaches to conferencing.** The following themes address topics related to ESL Writing Fellows' approaches to conferencing:

***Theme 18: Quality conference time is valuable to ESL students.*** While feedback is important to help students improve, it should be followed by one-on-one conferences where the tutor/instructor explains intended meaning. Students appreciate the conference as a follow-up to receiving feedback, by both teachers and Fellows. This theme suggests that the model of providing both feedback and conference time seems to be effective. Accordingly, administrators should work to help Fellows develop effective strategies to connect responses with conference activities. Also, Fellows should follow up with feedback previously given, but be prepared to go

over additional topics for students who revise as suggested. Several Fellows commented that they were surprised and unprepared when students would revise per the feedback. In order to prevent this, Fellows should be encouraged to prepare additional issues based on the lower-end priorities as relevant to address in conferences as a backup.

***Theme 19: Conferences may be an effective way of providing scaffolded instruction.***

Some students indicated that the conferencing was more effective than the written feedback, because the Fellows could then talk students through the issues at hand. This may be an effective way of providing scaffolded instruction and helping students work through difficult concepts. However, without feedback in advance, the conference would likely be a less effective use of time. Writing Fellows help their students as they spend quality time both responding and conferencing with the students they work with. In this role, Fellows act as guides, supporting students, rather than taking the more directive and dictating role that teachers may be forced to take. Administrative policies that support tutor participation with students outside of the required conferences should be established to help students feel invested. If possible, programs should secure sufficient funding to pay tutors for extra time spent with students.

***Theme 20: Fellows need to be as flexible as possible to meet with students when they can to reduce the logistical burden of the extra steps of conferencing with a tutor.*** Taking the time needed to meet with tutors in addition to the daily demands of matriculated students can appear to be a burden, so Fellows should do their best to meet students at a time convenient to them. And administrators should encourage this in their tutors. Fellows should be expected to contact their students early on with their availability, and clear their schedules as much as possible in advance.

***Theme 21: If Fellows meet with students outside of the expected/required conference, students may develop more of an authentic relationship with their Fellows.*** Students reported that they appreciated the additional help from their Fellows beyond the usual two conferences expected by the program guidelines. The Fellows also reported that they enjoyed working with students, with some tutors meeting for longer than the expected 30 minutes. Being willing to meet with students outside of the expected/required conferences may help students develop more of an authentic relationship with their Fellows, and thus students may be more willing to follow the advice of the tutors. By meeting more regularly or for longer times, Fellows show a desire to help students progress, and students may respond to this perceived investment of the tutors.

This relationship may help students be receptive to constructive feedback from their Fellows. However, administrators need to be cautious about requiring extensive time commitments on the part of their tutors, and thus should balance meeting the student needs with Fellow limitations. Developing self-regulated learners should also be a priority; Fellows need to be aware of when students may rely on them too much, and take appropriate steps to encourage students to take better control of their learning.

***Theme 22: In-conference activities to practice difficult concepts may be a productive use of conference time.*** Students indicated that activities such as reading the paper aloud can be helpful despite being awkward initially. ESL Fellows also agreed that having activities prepared that would address various L2 writing issues would be useful for conferences. Administrators should help Fellows develop effective activities for conferences, and emphasize the need for Fellows to use these activities during conferences. These resources should be recorded and accessible for future Fellows to use as well.

***Theme 23: Fellows should teach principles, but also let the students produce writing on their own, in a safe conference environment.*** As an extension of Theme 22, ESL Fellows should incorporate a series of activities to teach, practice, and produce writing to verify that the principles have been learned thoroughly. One activity likely isn't enough to ensure that the student has internalized the concept that the tutor is trying to teach. Accordingly, some activities or practice beyond the scope of the paper would be appropriate to incorporate. For example, when working on thesis development, a Fellow could have the student formulate several thesis statements on various topics, not just one for the specific paper they are working on. While students may initially resist, the additional practice should be helpful. Administration should ensure that handouts and other resources are readily accessible for tutors to employ, and provide training sessions to help Fellows practice using these resources.

***Theme 24: Students don't like needing to rewrite their entire paper due to inappropriate topic choice.*** Perhaps rather obviously, students don't like needing to rewrite their entire paper because they started out writing about a topic that isn't appropriate or didn't match the assignment expectations, as discussed in one focus group. Some Fellows informed students that, due to not matching the assignment description, their essays would best be rewritten. While the Fellows in this situation addressed issues according to the priorities outlined in Chapter 3, this situation may need to be accounted for in the future. Class instructors may be able to avert this issue by approving topic choice of thesis statements for students before they write the first draft, which is then sent to the Fellows for feedback. This approach may help students choose appropriate topics for assignments.

These themes provide interesting implications for ESL Writing Fellows programs. While some themes simply reinforce various effective aspects of the program, others suggest that some

change is needed for the program to be more effective at meeting student and teacher needs.

While more research is needed to verify this, administrators should be aware of these themes and be prepared to address them appropriately.

## Chapter 5: Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusions

### Introduction

This chapter presents some of the limitations of the current study and recommendations for further research. Additionally, general conclusions are summarized.

### Study Limitations

This study was the first to investigate an ESL Writing Fellows program. As no other research has previously been done on the topic, or no significant research on the topic of tutoring in ESL settings, this was first and foremost a preliminary study. This section will identify some of the weaknesses and problems of the current study.

The surveys were one area of weakness, as the survey instruments were not designed primarily for an ESL audience. The first two instruments are validated and reliable instruments used in a variety of settings, but those settings have, up until now, primarily been native English composition studies. The strategies instrument is a L2 instrument, but tends to be used more in research looking at L2 acquisition of various languages by native English students. Because the instruments were not designed for use with ESL students, it is difficult to determine if they were appropriate to use in this situation, given the limited English proficiencies of the student participants. If participants were unable to properly understand the intended meaning of items, responses would consequently lack in trustworthiness.

An additional area of weakness of this study was the approach of identifying interview participants based on survey responses. While this allowed the researcher to gauge impact of the semester on ESL student participants, the researcher had no way of determining whether or not any change in response on the part of the student was due to the influence of the Writing Fellow or the instructor, or even some other external influence acting as a lurking variable. Accordingly, outside of the open ended questions in the post-program survey asking about the influence of the

WFs, little correlation between responses and WFs impact could be verified. A true experimental design may be able to provide more reliable data to indicate such a correlation.

Additionally, the design of this project did not allow researchers to determine statistical significance of the program's influence on the student participants. While the pre- and post-program surveys allowed some quantitative data to be collected, given that two different teachers were involved and no control group could be created and employed, statistical analyses could not be run. Therefore, the surveys were used primarily to determine appropriate interview participants and to create surface validity for the student participants. The various aspects of writing covered by the surveys helped the students believe that the researcher was looking at writing and the ELang 105 class in general, which then should prevent the participants from answering questions while trying to match perceived expectations. However, this may not have been completely successful.

Similarly, while the data collected by interviews can be suspect, due to the interviewer leading the participants, the researcher took care to avoid asking questions that mention the ESL WFs program by name until well into the interviews, to allow participants to present authentic themes to them about the instruction. However, despite this approach, vocal and non-vocal cues from the researcher may have influenced the interview responses. Additionally, relying on the stories of only six participants to describe all possible perceptions may be an over simplification.

Similar to the interviews, while the researcher took care to create a focus group approach that would start off looking at the ELang 105 class in general, before focusing more on the ESL WFs program, the focus group facilitators may have inadvertently led participant responses. Also, given that the focus groups consisted occasionally of interview participants, those interview participants may have been able to deduce the true focus of the study, and thus influence their



peers in the focus groups. Additionally, while care was taken to train focus group facilitators on how to direct focus groups without leading participants to specific conclusions, given that multiple facilitators were employed in this study, consistency was hard to measure or ensure. Finally, focus group participants often came late to the class period in which a focus group was held, which may result in missed perspectives from those participants.

Generally, while most students involved in the five sections of ELang 105 responded to all instruments fully, some participants did not complete the post survey, and thus were not considered for interviews. Similarly, some participants missed class the day the focus groups were held. Those students may have provided additional insights and perspectives that would have been valuable to this study.

While the instructors and Fellows tended to be quite open with the researcher when discussing the program, only two teachers were involved, and both of those teachers were fairly experienced at teaching L2 writing. Accordingly, this study affords only those perspectives. Similarly, the Fellows were all hired and trained during one period, and thus had similar levels of experience working with ESL students. Only sheltered ESL freshman composition classes at BYU classes were used in the study, which limits the theoretical applicability of these results to different contexts.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This research project is the first and only investigation of an ESL Writing Fellows program, as no other such programs have been devised to this point. As such, this project was designed to lay the groundwork for additional research to be done on the Writing Fellows model as used in ESL settings. This section will detail possible additional research approaches.

While the perceptions of the various participants provided valuable insights, a more unbiased approach to seeing the impact of ESL WFs on L2 writing could be provided by an analysis of the texts produced by participants. By analyzing various aspects of student writing, such as T-units, transition use, organizational markers such as thesis statements and topic sentences, etc., researchers could see if an ESL Writing Fellows program truly is effective at increasing ESL student mastery of said topics. This approach would be able to statistically verify improvements in student writing, and could link said improvements to ESL WF influence.

In addition to the short term study of this project, a longitudinal study would provide insights into how authentically students employ WF suggestions in other assignments for other classes across academic careers. While short-term improvements are valuable to students, the true test of the impact of such a program comes with long-term implementation. Accordingly, such a study looking at how students write in additional classes after participating in an ESL WFs program would be valuable. A longitudinal perceptual-based study may also be feasible and may provide useful long-term insights.

Also, expanding the ESL WFs program to various other situations would further test the applicability of the program. In addition to matriculated BYU students in freshman composition classes, various other writing intensive classes across campus would be interesting to examine, and support a more traditional application of WAC theory. Other universities could also see if such programs could provide similar support for their students and authentic practice for TESOL students. Investigating the program in different levels such as pre-matriculation IEPs, EFL classes, etc. would be valuable as well. These are just a few of the many possible research studies that could be conducted on ESL Writing Fellows programs.

Although not specific to Writing Fellows programs, the survey data collected in this study indicate that teachers may have a large impact on L2 writers' perspectives of writing. An authentic experimental study using these survey instruments may provide valuable information on the topic. These surveys could also be used to provide instructors with insights into student attitudes. Such data could also be used to provide evaluations of the teacher outside those commonly employed by institutions. Writing teachers commonly try to help students learn to enjoy writing; such a study could measure how effectively that is being accomplished.

### **Conclusions**

While some exceptions were found, the majority of the participants (ESL students, writing teachers, and Writing Fellows) perceived the ESL Writing Fellows program to be successful. The program did have some issues with the way it was implemented; the themes given above provide insights into both the successes and weaknesses of this program that should be considered by administration.

Generally, the students appreciated the help with writing, especially when the Fellows proactively contacted them, provided good feedback matching that of the writing instructors, prepared well for conferencing using various activities, and worked with students who needed extra attention. However, if Fellows neglect any of the above situations, students perceive that they don't receive needed assistance, and the WFs process may be nothing more than an extra burden to busy students. The bulk of the responsibility for the success of the program from the students' perspectives rests with the Fellow. Consequently, administrators should make sure to hire and train effective tutors per the guidelines established by the themes.

Both writing teachers and ESL Writing Fellows perceived that the ESL WFs program was effective. Writing teachers valued the one-on-one attention that the Fellows provided their

students, and felt that the program provided extra support. However, the teachers often found that the feedback given to the students was not as specific as needed, or did not address significant issues. Again, the success of such a program relies on employing competent and proactive tutors, and training them to address issues appropriately. Fellows perceived the opportunity to work closely with ESL students and proficient writing teachers to be valuable experience that likely will help with their careers, although they noted as well that they often struggled with identifying and addressing significant issues in an appropriate way. They also commented that they would appreciate additional, specific training on various aspects of L2 writing, particularly grammar features.

Based on the results of this study, ESL Writing Fellows programs may be an effective way of providing support for ESL students. TESOL minors also may obtain valuable experience by working in such a program. While an added expense to universities and logistically complicated, implementing such programs may be worth the financial and time costs to an institution, given a critical mass of ESL students at an institution to justify the expense. Further development of these programs warrants additional research.

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## Appendix A: Survey Instruments

### The Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test

The Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test items as used in the pre- and post-program surveys given to the student participants of this study are given in this section. The following directions were given:

“Please rate yourself on the following items by selecting *Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, *Agree*, or *Strongly Agree*. There are no correct answers. Simply give your honest response to each item.”

I avoid writing.

I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.

I look forward to writing down my ideas.

I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.

Taking a writing course is a very frightening experience.

Handing in an essay makes me feel good.

My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my essay.

Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.

I would enjoy submitting my writing to journals or magazines for evaluation and publication.

I like to write down my ideas.

I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.

I like to have my friends read what I have written.

I'm nervous about writing.

People seem to enjoy what I write.

I enjoy writing.

I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.

Writing is a lot of fun.

I expect to do poorly in writing classes even before I enter them.

I like seeing my thoughts on paper.

Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable.

I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a writing course.

When I hand in an essay, I know I'm going to do poorly.

It's easy for me to write good essays.

I don't think I write as well as most other people.

I don't like my essays to be evaluated.

I'm not good at writing.

### **Writing Self-Efficacy Assessment**

The Writing Self-Efficacy Assessment items as used in the pre- and post-program surveys given to the student participants of this study are given in this section. The following directions were given:

“Please rate yourself on each item by choosing a number between 0 and 100, with 100 being the highest.”

I can (in English) write a strong paragraph that has a good topic sentence or main idea.

I can (in English) write a well-organized and sequenced paper.

I can (in English) write an introduction that will effectively set up the rest of the paper.

I can (in English) write a strong and convincing conclusion to a paper.

I can (in English) get my ideas across in a clear manner by staying focused without getting off the topic.

I can write using the correct forms of words in English.

I can write using correct English sentence structure (syntax).

I can write using a large and appropriate English vocabulary.

I can (in English) create a strong and effective thesis (controlling) statement.

I can (in English) give sufficient evidence for all of my ideas.

I can (in English) use correct and effective punctuation.

### **Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index**

The Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index writing items as used in the pre- and post-program surveys given to the student participants of this study are given in this section. The following directions were given:

“Check the box that describes your use of each listed strategy. The categories are: *I use this strategy and like it; I have tried this strategy and would use it again; I've never used this strategy but am interested in it; and This strategy doesn't fit for me.* Please note that "target" language refers to English.”

#### **Strategies for basic writing:**

Practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language.

Plan out in advance how to write academic papers, monitor how my writing is going, and check to see how well my writing reflects what I want to say.

Try writing different kinds of texts in the target language (e. g., personal notes, messages, letters, and course papers).

Take class notes in the target language as much as I'm able.

### **Strategies for writing an essay or academic paper:**

Find a different way to express the idea when I don't know the correct expression (e. g., use a synonym or describe the idea).

Review what I have already written before continuing to write more.

Use reference materials such as a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus to help find or verify words in the target language.

Wait to edit my writing until all my ideas are down on paper.

### **Strategies to use after writing a draft of an essay or paper:**

Revise my writing once or twice to improve the language and content.

Try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.

### **Peer Tutoring Items**

In addition to the three instruments given above, students were also asked some basic information about previous tutoring experiences. Those items are given here:

When writing in your native language, how often have you used writing tutors?

Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Regularly

My previous tutoring experience in my native language has been positive or negative (select one) because... (free response).

When writing in English, how often have you used writing tutors?

Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Regularly

My previous tutoring experience in English has been positive or negative (select one) because... (free response).

## Appendix B: Post-Program Survey Additions

The post-program survey used the three instruments given in Appendix B (the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test, the Self-Efficacy Assessment, and the writing portion of the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index), which were identical to those items of the pre-program. The questions about prior tutoring experiences given in Appendix B were replaced with the following items:

Did you meet with your Writing Fellow all required times?

Yes, No

How many times did you meet with your Writing Fellow?

Options from zero to seven or more were given.

My tutoring experience with my Writing Fellow was positive or negative (select one) because...

(free response).

Have you used tutors more or less frequently this semester than in semesters before?

Much less frequent, Less frequent, About the same, More frequent, Much more frequent

From my Writing Fellow, I learned... (free response).

I wish my Writing Fellow had... (free response).



## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (student's name),

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Before we begin, I would like to remind you of what my purpose is. I am interested in finding out what prompted various changes between the drafts of your papers written for ELang 105. I will be taking notes of our conversation to capture all of your good ideas. Your name will never be mentioned or included in what is written. Do you have any questions?

#### *Demographics/Introductions*

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself (where you grew up, time in U.S.).
2. How long have you been at BYU?
3. When do you anticipate graduating? What is your major?

*Grand tour question:* We are here to talk a little bit about your experience ELang 105. Tell me what your writing experience ELang 105 has been like.

#### *Major questions:*

1. Some people like to study English in their home countries, but other prefer to go to English-speaking countries. What made you decide to come to the United States to learn English?
2. How much experience have you had prior to ELang 105 writing in your native language in academic settings?
3. Do you enjoy writing in your native language?
4. How much experience have you had prior to ELang 105 writing in English in academic settings?
5. Do you enjoy writing in English?
6. Comparing your first and second drafts of this paper, I see that you changed \_\_\_\_\_. What prompted this change?
7. How did (teacher influence, classroom discussion, tutoring influence) encourage this change?
8. What did you find most useful about the ELang 105 instruction?
9. Did you find the individual tutoring valuable? How so?
10. What rhetoric (organization) information from your Writing Fellow's suggestions did you find most useful?

11. What sentence level information from your Writing Fellow's suggestions did you find most useful?

12. What was least useful from your Writing Fellow?

13. Will you apply anything from your Writing Fellow's suggestions to academic papers you write in the future? What specifically?

Do you have anything to say about what we discussed during this interview?

Thank you again for your help!

## Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol and Questions

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a student who is part of a group that is conducting research on the ELang 105 classes. We are holding small group discussions in each section of ELang 105 to see what you think of the instruction and resources available to you. At any point, if you would like to stop participating in the discussion, you are free to do so. However, we value your input. No grades will be assigned for participating, and all comments will be completely anonymous in the research or any subsequent publications. We are not even recording the discussions. \_\_\_\_\_ will be writing down some of your perspectives and good ideas, as will I, just so we can improve the classes. I will ask some broad questions, with follow up questions as appropriate. If I don't cover something that you'd like to share, please write any questions down you may have to ask at the end of the discussion. I will ask if I missed anything then.

(As relevant) We will now split into two groups. (Facilitate the movement, make sure students are in circles)

1. In ELang 105, what most influenced your writing?
  - a. Follow up questions could probe more to get at specifics like how and how significantly, ask specific students if what the first students say is true for them, etc.
2. What resources were available to you as an ELang student?
  - a. What resources were most helpful and least helpful in your opinion and why?
3. Part of your 105 experience has been working with a Writing Fellow. I would be very interested in hearing about your impressions of the Writing Fellow help that you received.
4. What did your Writing Fellow do that most helped you improve your writing to you as a second language learner?

5. What did your Writing Fellow do that least helped you improve your writing to you as a second language learner?
6. In general, do you think that having a Writing Fellow helped you to improve your writing in English? How so/Why not?

Well, that's all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## Appendix E: IRB Consent Form

Consent to be a Research Subject

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### Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Kendon Kurzer (graduate student) and Dr. Norman Evans (professor), at Brigham Young University to investigate writing in English as a second language. You were invited to participate because you are enrolled in English Language 105 in Fall, 2012.

### Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will be asked to complete two surveys for approximately thirty (30) minutes each about writing in English outside of class at your own convenience
- you agree to let papers written in this class be used for research purposes
- you may be asked to be interviewed to talk about writing in English
- the interview will take place in the researcher's office at a time convenient for you or it will take place at a time and location convenient for you
- the researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers for approximately fifteen (15) minutes.
- total time commitment will be 60 to 90 minutes
- you will be asked to participate in focus groups near the end of the semester, which will consist of group discussions held in class
- no interviews or focus groups will be recorded.

### Risks

There are minimal risks for participation in this study. If you feel uncomfortable about answering a particular question on either of the surveys or in an interview, you may choose to decline or excuse yourself from the study.

### Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you. It is hoped, however, that through your participation researchers may learn about second language writing, which may affect how writing is taught at Brigham Young University in the future.

### Confidentiality

The research data will be kept in a password-protected computer, and only the researchers will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in the researcher's locked office for one year (January, 2014), after which all data will be erased. All student papers will have personal identifying information removed and will be treated anonymously. Anonymous quotations from some student papers may appear in publication. Surveys ask for participant names but only for the purpose of linking pre- and post-program survey data. A master list will be created to link names to data but will be stored separately and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

**Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade, or standing with the university.

**Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kendon Kurzer at 231.742.1191 or at [kkurzer8@gmail.com](mailto:kkurzer8@gmail.com) or Dr. Norman Evans at 801.422.8472 or at [norman\\_evans@byu.edu](mailto:norman_evans@byu.edu) for further information.

**Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).

**Statement of Consent**

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_