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Editorial Introduction

Growing Our Scholarship through The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools

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Growing SSWC Scholarship through *The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools*

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When we (Amber and Renee) met at a writing center conference in 2015, we were both founder-directors of secondary school writing centers (SSWCs): Amber at Edison High School in Northern Virginia and Renee at Peters Township Middle School in Pennsylvania. For both of us, the seeds of writing center work had been planted during our respective undergraduate experiences as peer tutors. We quickly discovered, however, that growing our understanding of peer tutoring practices, deepening our knowledge of writing center administration, and sustaining our centers was not feasible in isolation. Rather, the well-being of our writing centers depended on a root system that connected us with other SSWC practitioners who were also exploring, learning, and leading in their own schools. Our tutors, likewise, benefitted from connecting with peers at other schools, as they recognized the impact of their work on their own and fellow students' lives and participated as professionals in a broader community.

Connecting through the growing network of SSWC directors and tutors—one that long predates either of us—we discovered a shared passion for nurturing and disseminating scholarship about writing center praxis. We recognize the importance of documenting, researching, reflecting on, writing about, and even calling into question the work of peer tutoring and writing center administration in secondary schools, both for individual practitioners and for our field as a whole.

However, we have also both had the experience of reaching for literature specifically dedicated to secondary peer tutoring and coming up empty-handed. Without question, many groundbreaking publications have been written about and for secondary centers, and our goal is to offer a cohesive space to continue that work. We know that archiving our understanding of secondary peer tutoring as it evolves and fostering an inclusive and vibrant space for spirited discussion will educate and energize our professional community. It is thus with a debt of gratitude to colleagues, past and present, who have planted and nurtured seeds of inquiry into secondary school peer-tutoring practices that we are thrilled to introduce the inaugural issue of *The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools (JPTSS)*.

It is important to us that the journal's first editorial introduction be coauthored by Amber, the founding editor of *JPTSS*, and Renee, the current president of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA), because we want to highlight the interconnected missions and values of the journal and its sponsoring organization. We note that both SSWCA and *JPTSS* are invested in supporting and continuing the work of secondary school writing centers (SSWCs) and secondary school peer-tutoring centers alike; we see the missions of both writing-focused and general learning-focused peer-tutoring centers as interconnected and aligned with our mission. Using *peer tutoring* instead of *writing centers* in the title of the journal was an intentional decision made to include relevant research and practice related to directors and peer tutors at all secondary school writing and learning centers. While we describe our own beginnings and existing scholarship related to SSWCs in this introduction, we refer to secondary peer-tutoring centers to reflect the aims of our journal.

We begin by describing how the journal came to be, then we share how our own professional journeys planted the seeds for this new publication. Next, we offer a brief history of SSWCA to acknowledge the ways

that *JPTSS* is a natural extension of the organization. We note the importance of deepening and extending our roots by inviting new scholarship in our field. And finally, we share the mission of *JPTSS* and offer prospective contributors some considerations about researching and writing for this publication. At the end of the introduction, readers will find a preview of this inaugural issue, including brief descriptions of and reflections about each contribution.

The Idea of The Journal for Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools

As practitioners and teacher-scholars, we invite our director colleagues and their tutors to supplement a necessary body of scholarship related to secondary peer-tutoring centers. The journal was designed to engage members of our community to write as knowledgeable practitioners, conduct scholarly research, and publish as practitioner-experts. Without a centralized space dedicated for research about secondary peer-tutoring centers, contributions to the scholarship will remain scattered and challenging for their intended audience to discover.

JPTSS was an organic idea. As SSWCA's reach has expanded in recent years, the SSWCA Board has heard from members, new and veteran, about their need for data to support their work. *Advocating, Building, and Collaborating: A Resource Toolkit to Sustain Secondary School Writing Centers* (Brown and Waldrup) was a natural place to direct people, with its pages of practical and replicable resources designed by secondary school directors, and in some cases tutors. However, that publication was more than a year in the making, and we knew it was not possible to update it frequently enough to include the new practices centers were embracing. A large number of centers were expanding beyond the traditional writing center model to tutoring in all subjects, and virtual tutoring was beginning to flourish even prior to the pandemic. As editors of the *Toolkit*, Stacey Waldrup (Hahn) and Renee knew the toolkit was not going to be able to keep up with the innovations and needs of the secondary peer-tutoring community.

Consequently, we began to conceptualize this journal: a publication with the same focus, audience, and high standards as the *Toolkit* but in a medium that allows for more frequent issues to keep a pulse on current trends and to be open to wider authorship. We publish *JPTSS* for those wishing to start a center, for those deep in their practice, for tutors striving to improve their centers, and for everyone else who has a stake in this important work. We begin by sharing how our own professional journeys planted seeds that led us to create a new space for directors and tutors of secondary peer-tutoring centers to publish and celebrate their work.

Planting Our Seeds: Our Journeys into Scholarship

We expect that anyone who reads this journal has a story that led to their interest in learning from—and, hopefully, contributing to—scholarship on secondary peer-tutoring programs. The existence of this journal begins, in large part, with our stories.

Amber

For me, it was seeing the spark in my tutors' eyes as I watched them take on real leadership roles through our writing center: planning and directing workshops on college essay writing; composing our writing center's tutor handbook; working with a biology teacher to revise a research writing assignment; conducting inquiries into our writing center's practices; and presenting at national conferences for (mostly postsecondary) peer tutors in Chicago in 2012 and in Orlando in 2014. The tutors from my center were excited to discover that other people found their ideas compelling and valuable.

The writing center helped me find my professional voice, too. Clint Gardner, Dawn Fels, and Andrew Jeter, colleagues I had met through writing center conferences, invited me to present on a panel with them at my first national conference. Pam Childers, who guest-edited a special issue of *Across the Disciplines*, mentored me through writing my first published article, "Empowering Student Writing Tutors as WAC Liaisons in Secondary Schools" (Jensen). Friends and colleagues I met while organizing the Annual Peer Tutoring in Secondary

Schools Conferences at George Mason University opened the way for me to apply for, and eventually complete, a PhD program in writing and rhetoric there. With each step of my professional journey, the risks felt huge and the imposter syndrome loomed, yet always, the rewards were great.

Now, as the founding editor of *JPTSS*, I am excited to stay connected with my friends and colleagues in the secondary peer-tutoring center community and to support the growth of this important body of literature about our work.

Renee

My passion for writing center work developed through a series of fortunate events. As an undergraduate tutor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, my coworkers and I noticed a recurring issue: clients were asking how to revise their work that was flagged as plagiarized by a new program called Turnitin. Our director, Ben Rafoth, allowed us to experiment and try to discern how the software functioned and what our role as tutors was in supporting clients required to use the platform. Four of us presented our findings at the IWCA-NCPTW Conference in Minneapolis in 2005, and our presentation resonated with attendees. After months of trying to formalize our work, “Taking on Turnitin.com: Tutors Advocating Change” (Brown et al.) was published in *Writing Center Journal* in 2007; in 2016 our article was anthologized by Oxford Press (Fitzgerald and Ianetta). That experience shifted the course of my career.

I opened my middle school center in 2011. Five years later, I walked my own tutors through the publication process with *The Peer Review* (Goldsmith et al.). My tutors and I recognized how being tutors benefited them as individuals, so we set out to document those soft skills. It took nine months to draft a polished manuscript and another year before publication, but my students had the unique experience of authentic, collaborative authorship and created one of the first pieces of scholarship about middle school writing centers.

I am so proud to be a part of the creation and launch of *JPTSS* because it opens the same route that so wonderfully altered my path. SSWCA recognizes that tutors have knowledge that pushes the field, and we highlight those tutor voices at our annual national conference. Now, we document those perspectives permanently.

Branching Out: CAPTA, SSWCA, and a Broader Mission

An early iteration of the root system that connected us to each other and to other directors of peer-tutoring centers was the Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association (CAPTA), which formed officially in 2014 but had grown out of annual conferences led by and for SSWC directors and tutors in Northern Virginia dating back to 2011 (for a more detailed history, please refer to Kate Hutton’s blog post “[The Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association: Legitimizing and Sustaining the Work of Secondary School Writing Centers](#)”). In the early days of the organization, a small group of teacher-directors and student-tutors, mostly from the same suburban public school district in Northern Virginia, connected somewhat regularly and collaborated to establish a tutor training course and a collection of resources to share with emerging and existing writing centers. We found strength in supporting each other and innovating in response to unexpected changes like changes in administration, shifts in school schedules, funding challenges, and other hurdles. We branched out our network to build and sustain centers beyond a regional geography, supported by the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), which published its “Position Statement on Secondary School Writing Centers” in 2015, drafted by SSWC leaders at the time. Eventually outgrowing its regional roots and becoming an international organization with over eighty member schools across the United States and the world, CAPTA became SSWCA in 2018.

For the past ten years, the focus of our growing, grassroots organization has been bringing peer-tutoring center directors, tutors, and school administrators together in physical—and, recently, virtual—spaces at annual conferences and other gatherings. Our conferences have grown tremendously from the first one, held in 2011 with 100 attendees from 11 high schools from Northern Virginia, to the most recent, hosted virtually in 2021 with

671 attendees from 60 middle schools, high schools, and colleges from 18 states and the District of Columbia. The fruits of collaboration between secondary peer-tutoring centers have been great; for example, we know about directors who have collected and shared their own data to support directors whose principals were cutting funding or courses or director compensation. Directors from middle school writing centers or directors from all-subject peer-tutoring centers have become mentors to new directors just getting their centers off the ground. We can look to our colleagues for examples of university partnerships, centering social justice in the center, and other important initiatives.

In its mission statement, SSWCA asserts the following three core aims:

1. *Build community* among secondary school writing and learning center directors, tutors, and partners.
2. *Promote advocacy* for peer-driven programs that transform schools by empowering student leaders.
3. *Support development* and sharing of resources for new and existing centers across the United States.

These aims have been adopted in recent years by the organization under the leadership of Kate Hutton, and now Renee, in a range of exciting ways: we have extended opportunities for connection and collaboration to include regional representatives on the SSWCA board, hosted digital roundtables for SSWCA member directors and tutors, and published *Advocating, Building, and Collaborating: A Resource Toolkit to Sustain Secondary School Writing Centers* (Brown and Waldrup). As the organization's membership grows more widespread and more diverse, we recognize opportunities to learn from and lean on each other as our centers face new challenges and opportunities. We envision *JPTSS* being an important way for our organization to extend its reach and deepen its roots.

Our hope is that *JPTSS* will provide a space for middle and high school tutors to write about their experiences for an audience that genuinely wants to learn from them. We hope the journal will also encourage teacher-directors to rekindle and invest in their own writing practices, to find and trust their voices as knowledgeable practitioners and experts in a topic about which there remains so much to learn. Our community needs these voices.

Deepening Our Roots: JPTSS and a Call for New Scholarship

As founders of our writing centers and leaders of our professional community, we recognize and are deeply grateful for the roots of secondary peer-tutoring center scholarship. SSWCA's work stems from that of Pamela Farrell Childers, Rich Kent, Jennifer Wells and Dawn Fels, Andrew Jeter, and many others. These foundational teacher-director-scholars have carved out a space for peer-tutoring studies that grounds writing center theories and pedagogies within secondary school contexts. Their work offers practical foundations for writing center and peer-tutoring work within the context of secondary schools, and it has been, for many directors like us, an important starting place for our own work. But one piece that has been missing from our community—in a formal sense, at least—is something that both of us have worked to create: a curated body of current and accessible scholarship published specifically for and by secondary school practitioners.

Research about secondary school centers, however, can be difficult to find for secondary school teachers and students who likely do not regularly read (and may not even be aware of or have access to) the publications in which pieces on secondary centers have been published so far, for example, *Across the Disciplines* (Jensen), *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* (Childers et al.), *The Peer Review* (Goldsmith et al.), and state-level journals associated with National Writing Project sites or NCTE state affiliates (e.g., Haslam and Jensen; Hughes; Ziegler). A single article about secondary centers in a journal, blog, or website may spark interest in a prospective teacher-director, but a collected body of research about secondary centers remains elusive.

When a committee drafted a mission for the journal, it became clear that we wished to center the voices of all those committed to this work; therefore, having tutor perspectives was important. Secondary tutors were already in the practice of conducting research and presenting their findings and experiences at our national conference; the journal encourages those same students to preserve their work more permanently and in a way that is easily accessible to others in the community in a timely fashion.

At the same time, we want to open space for those directors who have expertise they otherwise have not been able to share. As practitioners ourselves, we understand that there is not always time for directors to draft, polish, and publish a manuscript. However, these perspectives are desperately needed to fill the gap in current literature regarding secondary peer tutoring. Adding our stories, pedagogy, and research to existing secondary peer-tutoring scholarship will foster further growth of peer-tutoring practices and improve the experiences of our members, tutors, clients, schools, and communities. *JPTSS* seeks to invite in, support, and spotlight those peer-tutoring voices that have otherwise been unheard.

Fertilizing Our Soil: Writing for *JPTSS*

So what does writing for a scholarly publication entail? We expect that many of our contributors may be writing for publication for the first time. We do not want unfamiliarity to deter directors, secondary tutors, college students, graduate researchers, or others invested in secondary peer-tutoring or writing centers from submitting articles for consideration. We are all connected because of writing, after all, and we acknowledge that writing is a process aided by conversation and revision. In an effort to bolster all contributors, even those submitting for the first time, the journal's Editorial Board offers resources to support writers and mentor authors toward publication. While we recommend visiting the "[Call for Submissions](#)" and "[Support for Writers](#)" pages on the *JPTSS* website for the most up-to-date details and resources, we want to share the founding mission statement of the journal as a way to help potential contributors think through why and how they should consider writing for *JPTSS*:

The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools is a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA). We seek to publish thought-provoking pieces that explore questions related to secondary school peer tutoring. We expect that contributing articles will be research-based, relevant—that is, timely and pertinent to peer-tutoring work—and situated within existing theory and conversation. Our goals include celebrating student and professional voices and contributing to the field of writing center theory and practice through scholarly discourse.

Within this mission statement, there are a handful of key ideas we'd like our prospective writers to consider:

Why does research matter?

Starting and maintaining a secondary writing or peer-tutoring center is no easy task, especially when so much of the literature has historically been grounded in postsecondary contexts. Many secondary directors have had similar experiences designing, advocating for, and eventually running our centers, but all too often, we discover we are re-creating the wheel. Sometimes we find ourselves making the case to administrators without research to support what we believe to be true. Research is crucial to identifying the kinds of tools and practices that are likely to be most effective; it can prompt tutors to think more deeply about why and how they engage with the peers they work with. Research offers important frameworks that help us see our challenges—and our successes—in new light. Conducting research can activate reflection on practice that can shift our priorities and improve our outcomes; publishing this research benefits others who can learn from and adapt findings to their particular context. Whether making a proposal to a principal or redesigning a tutor training program, consulting research can make our decisions more strategic and grounded in best practices.

Why does audience matter?

Many of us have, with good intention, subscribed to an academic journal only to glance at the contents, read a single article, and recycle it. Until now, there has not been a journal that speaks directly to secondary directors and tutors. *JPTSS* is the publication in which every article relates to the daily practices of secondary center directors and peer tutors; it's meant to be a publication that directors will read to deepen and extend their

knowledge base, that they might assign to tutors to reconsider their tutoring practices. While *JPTSS* is a scholarly publication, its articles are designed to contain actionable steps written for secondary directors and tutors so that we can all improve our centers.

Why does celebrating voices matter?

Ask any secondary director what time of year is the easy time of year, and they will chuckle. The work of secondary directors and tutors is ongoing: recruiting, training, tutoring, and, for many, proposing for and presenting at SSWCA's conference. The cycle continues as we reflect on changes for the next year, and then we begin recruiting again. SSWCA's annual conference is one event each year that highlights and celebrates voices in our community. We now offer *JPTSS* as another medium to celebrate the work of our colleagues and tutors. Too often our work goes unnoticed. This is an opportunity to share what works in each of our centers in a very visible way and to celebrate that ongoing labor. Without celebrations, writing center work would quickly simply be "work."

Why does contributing to the field of writing center scholarship matter?

There are several tried-and-true texts that many of us have leaned on in starting and growing our centers (see the Works Cited section below as a starting point), but books and articles can become quickly outdated, and they are necessarily limited in their scope. Our field has expanded more quickly than the literature has kept up. Centers are emerging across all kinds of secondary learning contexts: in urban, rural, and suburban schools; in public, private, and independent schools; in high schools and middle schools; in partnership with universities, community colleges, and community organizations; as writing centers and as all-subject peer-tutoring centers. It is important that all of these contexts and their related considerations be represented in the body of literature on SSWCs. Every year, directors and tutors try new initiatives and achieve successes that others could benefit from knowing, and a journal is the perfect forum for disseminating that theory and practice. By sharing our insights and successes through publication, we are contributing to the growth of centers we didn't even know existed.

Why do timeliness and pertinence matter?

Many of the current factors influencing secondary centers were less prominent even five years ago (transitioning our centers to fully virtual due to a pandemic, for one). There are so many topics buzzing in the conversations among directors and tutors, including designing inclusive and antiracist centers, implementing ethical online tutoring practices, and navigating shifts to all-subject tutoring centers. Our community is flexible and innovative, adapting to the evolving environment in ways that only a journal can keep pace with. Directors and tutors need resources that put them in conversation with the most up-to-date practices and ideas within our community. The journal creates a space for writing center practitioners in secondary spaces to share what works (or what doesn't), to explore relevant and time-sensitive ideas, with our colleagues. We sincerely hope you'll add your voice—whether you are novice or veteran to this community—to our ongoing conversation so that we can create a robust body of knowledge that will build on what we know already.

In the Inaugural Issue of JPTSS

This issue features voices across the range of the secondary peer-tutoring center community: current and former secondary school peer tutors, current and former secondary directors, school administrators, and scholars. We are pleased with the way this issue reflects the current concerns and the historical foundations of our shared work. We hope you will find it timely and useful.

To orient our readership to the journal and to SSWCA, we first recognize the members of both the *JPTSS* Editorial Board and the SSWCA Board. Without their vision and contributions, this journal would not have come to be. As an important center point of our work, we are proud to publish the "SSWCA Inclusivity, Equity, and Accessibility Statement for Secondary School Writing and Peer Tutoring Centers" (pg. 14), with a foreword

written by SSWCA Past President **Kate Hutton**. In this document, which has been drafted and revised over the past ten months, we reaffirm as an organization our commitment to principles of inclusion in our centers. We offer, in this statement, some guiding questions we hope all centers will use as they consider how to participate more fully in this work. We anticipate revisiting and revising this living document as we continue to learn, and we hope for your participation in that process.

After receiving and reviewing many submissions written by tutors and directors, many of which are still under revision, we published our first (and only) tutor research article, “Reviving Student Research: Strategies for Tutoring Student Research Papers” (pg. 16) by **Alexandra Wong**, former tutor at the Hayfield Secondary School Writing Center, now a first-year student at Johns Hopkins University. In her piece, Wong offers suggestions for training for and managing the tutoring load associated with major student research papers. We present her article here as an exemplar of the kinds of tutor research we hope to publish in future issues as well.

Chloe Truong, from Algonquin Regional High School, shares a personal narrative from her experience tutoring and being tutored by a close friend in the first *Voices from the Center* column. In “The Dread of Judgment: How Friendship Impacts Tutoring” (pg. 21), Truong reflects on what she learned as a tutor from being on the other side of the tutoring relationship and offers suggestions to other peer tutors to consider how to foster rapport with their peers. We hope to include more tutors’ and directors’ narratives in this column in future issues.

As a nod to the (yet-unpublished) wisdom and perspectives shared by secondary tutors, directors, and administrators at past CAPTA and SSWCA conferences, the *Learning from the Past* column in this issue archives the “Transformations from the Center” panel from the 2013 Secondary School Writing Centers Conference held in Fairfax, Virginia, on October 11, 2013 (pg. 23). After **Amber Jensen**’s editorial introduction, the column features the voices of **Susana Zelaya**, **André Sanabia**, and **Justine Burke**, all former secondary school writing center tutors, as they reflect on what they’ve carried with them from their tutoring experiences. **John Banbury**, former principal of Oakton High School, shares, from an administrator’s perspective, insights about how writing centers can support the institutional missions of the schools they serve. And **Janice Jewell** and **Matthew Kasper**, both former secondary school writing center founder-directors, offer their perspectives on creating vibrant and sustainable programs.

Current director of the peer tutoring program at West Springfield High School **Melissa Morgan** reviews *The Rowman and Littlefield Guide for Peer Tutors*, a resource she has found helpful in directing her program and fostering important discussions with her tutors (pg. 35). We envision our *Book Reviews* column to be an important space for sharing the resources that directors and tutors are using to improve their practice.

Finally, as part of our mission to highlight and celebrate the work of the secondary peer-tutoring centers in our community, this issue concludes with profiles of four secondary centers (pg. 37) from Meridian High School and St. Anne’s Belfield School (both recipients of the 2020 Jensen-Hutton Grant for Emerging Centers) and Skyline High School and Episcopal School of Baton Rouge. We acknowledge the work of *JPTSS* editorial assistants **Elizabeth Daley**, **Andrea Hilton**, and **Lucy Leishman** in featuring these schools and their unique centers.

This issue is only the beginning of what we envision as a rich and ongoing conversation among the members of the secondary school peer-tutoring community. We extend an invitation to participate in fostering and sharing knowledge within our community by considering proposing a conference presentation for the SSWCA 2022 conference to be held next spring in Boston, Massachusetts (see “Call for Proposals” on pg. 43) or submitting a paper for an upcoming issue of *JPTSS* (see “Call for Submissions” on pg. 49). Whether you are new to the community of writing and peer-tutoring centers or are a veteran, whether you are a director or a tutor, we hope you’ll consider adding your voice. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue.

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Dr. Amber Jensen is the editor of *The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools*. She directed the Edison High School Writing Center from its founding in 2009 until 2016, and she served as the founding president of the Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association (CAPTA) from 2014 to 2017. She earned her PhD in Writing and Rhetoric at George Mason University, where her research focused on digital and multimodal writing, preservice teacher education, and teacher agency. Now an assistant professor of English education at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, she remains invested in the development and sustainability of secondary school writing centers.

Renee Brown is the current president of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA). She opened the Peters Township Middle School Writing Lab in 2011 and continues to serve as the director and the English Language Arts teacher. She has represented secondary writing centers at the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conferences in recent years. Renee is an alumna of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she worked as an undergraduate tutor, and she holds a master's degree in English from the University of Pittsburgh.