

Charlotte Brammer, Samford University
Mary Rees, Calera Middle School

PEER REVIEW FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE: INVALUABLE OR INVALID?

Peer review is well established as an important theoretical component of the writing process. Early practitioners of process writing such as Peter Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee, Donald Murray, and Anne Ruggles Gere studied, discussed, published, and lived collaborative learning at a time when the "chalk and talk" lecture routine was standard throughout higher education. Thanks to their vision, the process of having students critique each other's papers has become commonplace in the composition classroom and in English composition textbooks. According to one survey, experienced instructors believe that all new teachers of composition should use peer review to at least some extent (Belcher 109). Although the emphasis on decentralizing the role of teacher once made peer review a cutting edge, progressive activity, it is now as entrenched as the old routine of lecture, write, and correct. Yet we frequently hear students complain bitterly that peer review is a waste of time or blame their peers for not "catching all the mistakes." We also hear colleagues grumble that students' papers are poor in quality and that students do not stay on task during the peer review process. While such behaviors and responses do not support the theory, they are a reality in many educational settings.

Only a few instances of empirical research examine what the students themselves think of their participation in peer review. Perhaps because peer response is practically instinctive to those of us who teach writing, few have felt the need to study the student perspective. Instead, studies have focused on the quality of peer comments, their effect on the revision process, and the best methods for conducting peer review. A few studies have indeed examined student attitudes (see Asraf; Murau; McGroarty and Zhu), but within the last decade, in particular, these studies have focused on second-language (L2) writers. Such focus provides valuable insight for both first-language (L1) and L2 teachers, but an examination of specifically L1 environments provides a useful comparison to L2 studies.¹ This lack of knowledge of student perception of the peer review process coupled with a concern about the difficulties inherent in group work motivated this study. In the remainder of this article, we report the results of faculty and student surveys from one university as a way of revisiting peer review and its value to the writing process.

A REVIEW OF PEER-REVIEW RESEARCH

Despite some continuing romantic emphasis on the solitary author, most composition scholars have established quite firmly that the composing process is social, and peer review is an integral part of that process. According to Bruffee, learning to write is not only a matter of knowing the elements of composition, but also involves the student's acculturation into the collegiate, educated world—a process vital to the student's ability to succeed (*Collaborative* 9). Arguing from a historical perspective, Gere asserts that, among other things, writing groups can help students overcome the alienation that occurs when writers create work that does not have an audience. Those who write solely “for the teacher” will find it difficult to predict their audience needs, which will increase their sense of isolation (10). Viewing writing as a social-interactive phenomenon, Martin Nystrand posits that “meaning is a social construct negotiated by writer and reader through the medium of text” (78). Robert Brooke notes the importance of peer audiences when he defines the goals of writing groups as helping each student to “understand the ways in which writing can be useful in many areas of one's life, as well as to have experiences which adapt writing to any of those uses” (9).

Many teachers, however, find that establishing a productive community of collaborative writers is anything but easy. As one faculty member notes, “It doesn't save me time” (qtd. Belcher 107). The sheer number of essays devoted to explaining *how* to conduct peer reviews attests to its complexity and required commitment. Although group work has found widespread acceptance, even Bruffee admits that “institutionalized educational collaboration in whatever form . . . is never unproblematical” (“Collaborative” 14). Hephzibah Roskelly asserts that collaborative groups in writing classrooms experience a conflict in aims: socializing, working toward “being let into the ‘academic club,’” and criticizing, “transforming structures by asserting the value of those without membership” (124). John Trimbur, himself an advocate of process writing, urges us to remember that we cannot eliminate power structures from writing groups, and therefore theories of collaboration must grapple with the fact that writing groups have the potential to reinforce conformity rather than negotiate new meaning.

Just as the theoretical perspectives acknowledge the complexity of peer review, practitioner advice is likewise varied. For example, Fiona Paton provides a list of peer review guidelines that includes critiquing a model paper and creating a new peer review checklist for each rhetorical task (294). Working from a different pedagogical stance, Jetta Hansen and Jun Liu suggest scaffolding the peer review process by modeling a paper through three steps: critical reading, suggesting revisions, and revising (35). Lisa Cahill extends this scaffolding by emphasizing collaboration at every step of the writing process, including involving students in creating peer review sheets. Susan Miller recommends involving the teacher directly in the process by having conferences with groups of four students at a time. In fact, there are probably as many different ways to conduct peer review as

there are instructors to conduct it; the question then becomes, what elements of peer review must gain pedagogical priority?

To answer this question, in part, we turn to the scholarship of L2 peer review. Studies that measure students' attitudes toward peer review are more frequent in L2 than L1 environments, but findings sometimes are based on mixed groups or are otherwise applicable to the L1 experience. For example, Andrea Murau found that both L1 and L2 students had mixed feelings about peer review, and several of those surveyed (up to 20%) would not participate in peer review if it were not required—even though they found it helpful. This survey also found that L2 students experienced a high degree of anxiety during the peer review process while L1 students felt more comfortable (73). In addition, Ratnawati Asraf's study of L2 first-year writers indicates that students see the value of peer review, but often give poor advice to their peers; thus, Asraf concludes that peer review may be most useful to writers who are proficient in the language (unless less proficient writers are given constant teacher oversight). Conversely, in their survey of L2 writers, Olga Villamil and María C. M. de Guerrero found that "[m]ost changes were incorporated" and were "95% correct" or in line with the professors' comments. Mark Simkin and Nari K. Ramarapu also discovered that computer science students trust peers to the extent that the majority of them are comfortable with the practice of peer rating, in which other students grade their term papers (256).

Such conflicting results lead us to question the effectiveness of peer review and student perceptions of it. To that end, we designed this study to measure whether and how peer review is used and valued in writing classrooms. We began with several key questions:

1. Does the frequency of peer review relate to perceived value of peer review for students and writing faculty?
2. Does the perceived value of peer review relate to the use of required and/or optional peer review?
3. Does student self-confidence in peer review relate to perceived value of peer review?
4. Does student self-confidence in peer review relate to perceived instruction in peer review?
5. Does perceived value of peer review relate to instruction in peer review, for both students and writing faculty?

METHODS

This study was conducted at a private master's-level comprehensive university in the southeastern United States. The university core curriculum includes a first year course sequence, Communication Arts I and II, which

emphasizes both writing and speech (unlike more traditional first-year writing courses). Students are also required to take two upper-level writing-intensive courses; most students complete this requirement through courses in their major. These discipline-specific writing-intensive courses are regularly reviewed as part of the university's writing across the curriculum program. Peer review is encouraged at all levels of writing-intensive courses. Data was gathered during the spring semester to ensure that most students had completed at least one writing course at the university. We conducted the study near the end of the semester when most courses require lengthy paper assignments; we felt the timing would ensure that students had a rich writing experience that would be fresh in their minds.

This particular university provides an appropriate location for this study, at least in part because of its homogenous population, which supports greater confidence in the study results.² The university is certainly working to increase campus diversity, but the profile is typical of many private institutions: largely white, middle-class, suburban, with selective enrollment.³ Approximately 65% of incoming students are female; 35%, male. We asked 72 faculty members who teach either the first-year Communication Arts courses or upper-level writing-intensive courses to participate in the study; of the 22 faculty respondents (30.5% response rate) who completed the survey, 19 self-identified as white and three abstained from providing any demographic data. Nine respondents were male; 10 were female. The faculty respondents represent 11 disciplines, although eight claimed English or "core" as their disciplines. We asked the writing faculty who agreed to participate in the study to survey their students.⁴

Judging from average enrollments in the first-year and upper-level writing-intensive courses, we estimate that 1,296 students were asked to take the survey. We received responses from 328 students (25% response rate). The number of faculty and student survey responses is in keeping with our average 1:15 faculty-to-student ratio in our writing courses. Thus, while the overall response rate is low, the per class response rate is strong (approximately 82%). Of the 328 student respondents, 208 (63%) were female; 103 (31%) were male. Seventeen respondents did not provide demographic data. This female-to-male ratio is consistent with the university's student body. Also in keeping with the university's overall demographic, 276 (84%) student respondents self-identified as white. The university has a small group of minority students, and this limited diversity is reflected in the study: 3.4% self-identify as African American, 1.8% as other, less than 1% as either Asian or Latina. Approximately 9% chose not to indicate ethnicity. That said, the students represent a fairly even spread across 30 majors and concentrations, with only 12.8% undeclared. Business was the largest declared concentration, with 40 (12.2%).⁵

RESULTS

The aggregate averages from the course evaluation results (see Table 1) suggest that peer review is used in most of the university's first year writing classrooms, but most students find peer review "not very helpful." The numbers improve when averages for individual class sections are combined. The section averages indicate that peer review is used "usually" to "always" in the first year writing courses and that students find them "somewhat helpful."

Question & Response	Aggregate Average	Section Average
<i>How often was peer review used in your class?</i> 1. Always; 2. Usually; 3. Occasionally; 4. Seldom; 5. Never	2.39	1.85
<i>How helpful was peer review in revising your paper?</i> 1. Very helpful; 2. Somewhat helpful; 3. Not very helpful; 4. Not helpful; 5. A waste of time	3.06	2.37

Table 1. Questions from First-Year Course Evaluations (n=27 sections)

According to the frequency counts and percentages in the faculty survey (see Table 2), most faculty (73%) claim to use peer review in their classrooms either "usually" or "always." This result is consistent with their view that peer review is a valuable part of the writing process (mean=3.77 on a 5-point scale) and their belief that peer review improves student writing (mean=3.45 on a 5-point scale). Similarly, most faculty require students to complete some form of peer review (72.7% require in-class peer review; 36.4% require out-of-class) and spend at least some class time preparing students to review each others' papers. This preparation seems to take the form of lecturing (50%), demonstrating "good peer reviews" through paper sharing (36.4%), and providing students with handouts (40.9%). Faculty consensus seems to break down over how often to assess peer review; however, there is a significant correlation between how much faculty value peer review as part of the writing process and how frequently they choose to assess it (Pearson's $r = .001$).

Question	Response
<i>How often do you use peer review in your courses?</i>	1. Never (0); 2. Seldom (4 / 18.2%); 3. Occasionally (2 / 9.1%); 4. Usually (7 / 31.8%); 5. Always (9 / 40.9%)
<i>Peer review is a valuable part of the writing process.</i>	1. Disagree to 5. Agree (range=2-5; mean=3.77; SD=.922)
<i>Peer review improves the quality of student writing.</i>	1. Disagree to 5. Agree (range=2-5; mean=3.45; SD=.800)
<i>What types of peer review do you use? (select all that apply)</i>	1. Required in-class peer review (16 / 72.7%); 2. Required out-of-class peer review (8 / 36.4%); 3. Encouraged students to ask friends to review papers (6 / 27.3%); 4. Encouraged students to visit Communication Resource Center (13 / 59.1%); 5. Other (5 / 22.7%)
<i>Do you assess peer review?</i>	1. Never (1 / 4.5%); 2. Seldom (5 / 22.7%); 3. Occasionally (6 / 27.3%); 4. Usually (6 / 27.3%); 5. Always (4 / 18.2%)
<i>How much time to you spend preparing students for peer review?</i>	1. None (1 / 4.5%); 2. Less than half a class (17 / 77.3%); 3. More than half a class (4 / 18.2%)
<i>How do you teach peer review? (select all that apply)</i>	1. I give no formal instruction in peer reviewing (3 / 13.6%); 2. I give students a handout on how to peer review (9 / 40.9%); 3. I lecture on how to peer review (11 / 50%); 4. I use role play to demonstrate how to peer review (3 / 13.6%); 5. I share a paper and demonstrate good peer review (8 / 36.4%); 6. Other (5 / 22.7%)

Table 2. Faculty Survey Results

Approximately two-thirds of student respondents reported that they [1] used peer review for more than half of their major writing assignments and [2] found peer review either “occasionally” or “usually” helpful in revising their papers (see Table 3). This finding held across academic rank and discipline. For most students (some 80%), peer review was required. Importantly, most students prefer some form of peer review: only 7.3% preferred not to participate in peer review [$\chi^2(4, n=328) = 20.988, p = .000$]. Student preferences for type of peer review vary, with “required peer review” and “friend or family member” receiving the most responses. Only one-third of the student respondents see value in in-class peer review, which is how peer review is generally practiced in this university’s first year composition classes, and only 16% want to seek assistance from the university’s resource center.⁶ Most students are at least somewhat confident in their ability to review peers’ papers and are taught to conduct peer review by handouts and lectures. (There were no significant differences between responses from males and females.)

The results indicate that frequency of peer review as part of producing major writing assignments relates positively to perceived value of peer review for students [$\chi^2(18, n=328) = 142.290, p = .000$]. In other words, when students participated in peer review for most or all of their major writing assignments, they were more likely to consider peer review as “usually” to “always” helpful. Similarly, perceived value of peer review for students correlates positively with required in-class peer review [$\chi^2(5, n=328) = 20.156, p = .001$]. Requiring students to complete in-class peer reviews seems to encourage them to view peer review as more important or more helpful. While seemingly at odds with students’ dislike of in-class peer review, this correlation is consistent with the finding that students who reported more preparation, in terms of methods—in how to peer review—also valued peer review more [$\chi^2(4, n=312) = 10.361, p = .035$]. Specifically, students who were prepared to carry out peer review through two or more teaching methods (e.g., handout, lecture, and paper demonstration) were more likely to find peer review helpful.

These positive impressions of peer review seem to be enhanced by student self-confidence in their ability to peer review. Students who are more confident in their ability to review peers’ papers also value peer review as an important part of the writing process [$\chi^2(4, n=318) = 15.443, p = .004$]. Not surprisingly, students who receive more instruction in how to peer review are more confident in their ability to review others’ papers. Students who reported that instructors used two or more methods in teaching the process of peer review also reported more confidence in their ability to peer review [$\chi^2(4, n=322) = 15.575, p = .004$]. Attempts to correlate specific pedagogical methods for peer review with student confidence were unsuccessful with this sample size.

Question	Response
<i>How often do you use peer review as a part of producing major writing assignments in your course?</i>	1. Never (42 / 12.8%); 2. With less than half of the major writing assignments (81 / 24.7%); 3. With more than half of the major writing assignments (68 / 20.7%); 4. With all major writing assignments (137 / 41.8%)
<i>If peer review is used in class, how helpful is peer review in revising your paper?</i>	1. Not helpful at all (15 / 4.6%); 2. Seldom helpful (59 / 18%); 3. Occasionally helpful (102 / 31.1%); 4. Usually helpful (107 / 32.6%); 5. Always helpful (35 / 10.7%). <i>Note that n=10 (3%) did not respond to this question</i>
<i>What type(s) of peer review do you use? (select all that apply)</i>	1. I participate in required in-class peer review (264 / 80.5%); 2. I participate in required out-of-class peer review (98 / 29.9%); 3. I ask classmates to peer review even when it is not required (67 / 20.4%); 4. I ask a friend or family member to review my papers (159 / 48.5%); 5. I go to the Communication Resource Center for peer review (69 / 21%); 6. Other (8 / 2.4%)
<i>Which type of peer review do you prefer?</i>	1. required in-class peer review (111 / 33.8%); 2. required out-of-class peer review (33 / 10.1%); 3. to ask classmates to peer review even when it is not required (37 / 11.3%); 4. to ask a friend or family member to review my papers (122 / 37.2%); 5. to go to the Communication Resource Center for peer review (54 / 16.5%); 6. (other) (13 / 4%); 7. not to have my papers peer reviewed (24 / 7.3%)
<i>I am confident of my ability to review a peer's paper.</i>	1. Never (10 / 3%); 2. Seldom (89 / 27.1%); 3. Occasionally (66 / 20.1%); 4. Usually (165 / 50.3%); 5. Always (64 / 19.5%)
<i>How have you been prepared to review a peer's paper? (select all that apply)</i>	1. I have had no formal instruction in peer reviewing (90 / 27.4%); 2. I was given a handout on how to peer review (137 / 41.8%); 3. I listened to a lecture on how to peer review (107 / 32.6%); 4. I watched / participated in role play of peer review (44 / 13.4%); 5. I was given a paper that demonstrated good peer review (71 / 21.6%); 6. Other (34 / 10.4%)
<i>Other thoughts or comments.</i>	160 / 48.8% responded.

Table 3. Student Survey Results

The final question on the student survey was *What other thoughts or comments do you have about peer review?* Of the 328 students who completed the surveys, 160 (49%) chose to respond. Of these 160 comments, 92 (57.5%) expressed positive impressions about peer review, and 66 (41.3%) were negative. Comments such as *Very helpful in getting input other than my own!* were coded as positive, while comments such as *Peers never seemed to be willing to be open and give honest feedback* were coded as negative. Two comments could not be coded as positive or negative: (1) *There was a big emphasis on it freshmen year but I haven't done it since then* and (2) *I would have liked to have gotten more instruction on how to peer review. That way I would be more confident in my peer reviewing skills and the skills that other students in the class had.* While the second comment could be construed as leaning toward positive, we decided that it did not fit the spirit of the other comments we had coded as positive.

In addition to coding the free-response comments as positive or negative, we also coded for topics that emerged from the data, specifically (1) busywork, notions that peer review was a waste of time or simply "free days"; (2) reviewer dependent, the idea that the value of peer review is directly related to the quality of the reviewer; (3) proofreading/editing, the idea that peer reviewing is synonymous with checking for errors; and (4) other, comments that did not fit within the other three categories. Of the 160 responses to the last question on the student survey, we coded 60 for topic; 100 responses simply expressed positive or negative opinions of peer review, (e.g. *Peer review is great!*)" Of those 60 comments, 31 (52%) remarked about the value of the reviewer, and 28 (47%) focused on proofreading or editing. Eight comments referred to peer reviewing as busywork. All but two comments fit one of the three categories; five comments included references to both the value of the reviewer and proofreading.

Conclusions

This study suggests that we have much work to do in helping students understand what peer review is (collaborative learning), and, more pointedly, what it isn't (proofreading). An extensive L2 study by Villamil and de Guerrero finds that, of changes suggested in peer review that were incorporated, "grammar was the most revised aspect whereas organization was the least attended to" (508). These findings of Villamil and De Guerrero are corroborated by research conducted by Asraf Ratnawati, who found that L2 students were extremely concerned about grammatical errors even though the assignment in question was not to be graded (76). Although the respondents to our survey were not L2 learners, they also had a clear expectation that peer review should help them catch proofreading errors. Likewise, Murau's study of both native and non-native speakers finds that both student groups appreciate peer review because it can help with, in their words, "minor mistakes" in "grammar, vocabulary" (74). This student concept of peer review is so common that Fiona Paton advises instructors to "be aware, however,

that most first-year students will approach peer review as a proofreading exercise and will tend to remain on the level of correcting spelling and punctuation" (292.) This misunderstanding of the theoretical goals of collaborative learning is surprising in light of the fact that collaboration in the writing classroom has been common for at least twenty years.

Student surveys in our study revealed a similar concern related to the perceived ability of the peer reviewer and his/her investment in providing quality feedback. While this study was not designed to investigate this aspect of peer review, many students indicated that they did not trust their peers to review their papers, stating that *I've never understood how having all students, including those who make C's & D's on papers, is beneficial. If they can't write a good paper, why do I want them to correct mine?* (Student survey #308). Of the 52% of the free-response comments that focused on the quality of the reviewer, most expressed concerns about classmates' dedication and ability to peer review. For example, one student responded, *I don't trust my peers to review my paper. I don't think they can do it competently, just like I don't think I can give a good Peer review b/c I am a horrible writer* (Student survey #272).

Even at a university with limited diversity, students enter the writing classroom with varying writing experiences and skills. Some may have written extensively in high school and developed fairly robust composing processes, including peer review skills, while others may have written only sparingly. Some students are confident in their writing abilities while others would rather give a speech or jump from the proverbial airplane than write a paper. If the developed writer laments the lack of "qualified peers" available for review, he or she may be correct on some levels: the excellent student writer may not have a true peer if that student defines a peer as someone of equal skills. Again, we suspect that students do not understand the purpose of peer review and its value in a developed writing process.

The literature on both L1 and L2 studies shows that this attitude of distrust toward the peer reviewer is not uncommon. In a 1992 study, Kate Mangelsdorf finds that 77% of L2 students surveyed who did not like peer review were afraid that their peers would not provide valid advice (qtd. in Murau 2). A similar study, in 1997, finds much the same results: one surveyed L2 writer states, "Peer Revision is a positive side to writing, but your peers do not always give you valuable feedback. Often my writing has changed for the worse when I receive comments from my peers" (qtd. in McGroarty and Zhu 31). In *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence and the Authority of Knowledge*, Bruffee refers to a long example provided by David L. Rubin discussing "Zelda" and her difficult experience learning to trust her peer reviewers, an experience he finds representative of many writers. Perhaps because of this distrust, most students in our survey prefer to choose a friend or family member whom they know and in whom they have confidence, a preference which is indicated in Murau's study as well. Murau notes that "the trust of a good friend also seemed to be a factor when choosing a

reviewer for L1 and L2 writers" (75). To the student, it seems only logical that for a peer to be helpful he or she must be at least as skilled as the writer.

Helping students to accept that collaboration rather than correction is the goal of the writing group is essential to the successful peer review session.⁷ The conclusion that McGroarty and Zhu reach is one that many instructors (Hansen and Liu; Cahill; Paton, etc.) have reached through practice: thorough preparation for peer review is vital to its success. Possibly, such preparation will offset the sense many students have that peers are not helpful, both by teaching students how to be effective reviewers and by teaching student writers what kind of help to look for (and appreciate) from peer reviewers. Our study suggests that providing handouts and lecturing are insufficient methods for demonstrating the collaborative value of peer review. The results of this survey indicate that professors must invest a great deal of class time to ensure a productive peer review, a finding in keeping with current literature on the subject. For example, Paul Rollinson suggests that "pre-training" for peer review focus on three areas: (1) raising awareness, (2) productive group interaction, and (3) productive response and revision. Like many others, he also recommends teacher feedback after peer review. Altogether, these perspectives suggest that the teacher spend substantial time focusing on the activity.

Although we agree with Paton that "[p]roductive peer review requires a typed and completed draft representing the student's best effort to that point" (293), more emphasis on peer review as a global activity may be in order. Students should not seek only to "correct" errors but should see peer review as a brainstorming process as well as an editing process. Perhaps we should revise and re-create our notion of peer review as an ongoing part of the process, a part that begins with brainstorming and is revisited at various reiterative stages throughout the composing process.

Such a re-visioning would require instructors to rethink the way they currently conduct peer reviews. For example, the results of this study support the importance of building rapport among classmates if our goal is to encourage productive peer review. Students need to create a sense of shared community in order to develop dialogues of trust and to build confidence in their classroom peers. Handouts and lectures cannot accomplish this task. Lisa Cahill argues that peer review needs to be "more than a series of questions that function in the textual vein" (304). Similarly, Gayle Nelson and John Murphy reinforce such collaborative learning theory, finding that the number of peer reviewer suggestions implemented in students' final essays depended on the communication environment of the reviewers/writers (cooperative or defensive) (140). This indicates that instructors need to continue to build collaborative groups that encourage rapport, moving away from lists of peer review questions that lead to a lot of writing, but little interaction.

Students seem to take their cues from instructors. If we stress the importance of peer review, our students are more likely to do so, but if we just go through the motions, perhaps passing out recycled handouts, our students will pick up on our lack of dedication and act accordingly. The results from our study

suggest that when students perceive purpose for the peer review (as opposed to an activity to take up class time, aka “busywork”) and faculty commitment to peer review (evidenced through regular practice, devotion of class time to preparing students to conduct peer review and actually doing peer review), they are more likely to feel confident about being able to review their classmates’ papers and seem to value the peer review process. And if we value peer review as a critical component of a fully elaborated writing process and accept the social interactive perspective of writing, then we must take the necessary steps to allow students to learn to trust their classmates as “true peers.”

NOTES

¹ Other researchers have noted that L1 and L2 students have different composing processes, language use, cultural perspectives, and motivation (see Silva, 1993; Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995; Nero, 1997). We cannot assume that research on L2 learners always applies directly to L1 learners; however, we must acknowledge that similarities exist. As writing instructors, we must continue to search for ways in which L2 studies can inform L1 and vice versa.

² According to Maxwell, “A small sample that has been systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation” (71).

³ ACT composite middle 50% range for entering freshmen is 23-28.

⁴ We do not know for certain whether all 22 faculty who completed the survey also had students complete the surveys, but most bundles of student surveys were accompanied by one faculty survey.

⁵ *Data Collection Procedures*: Faculty who taught as part of the first-year Communication Arts program or upper-level, writing-intensive courses were invited to participate via email. Faculty who elected to participate had the option of using electronic or paper surveys. We asked faculty to complete the faculty survey and to have their students complete (paper) student surveys. We worked to triangulate this study, working with both quantitative and qualitative data. First, we included two questions on all course evaluations for 27 first-year Communication Arts courses. These evaluations were completed in campus computer labs during class time as part of the regular course evaluation process. Student enrollment for these courses was 502; of those, 398 students completed evaluations (79.28% response rate). The evaluations were anonymous, and to ensure faculty and student privacy, only aggregate responses to the questions were provided. Second, we created one survey for writing faculty and another survey for students in writing-intensive courses. The surveys consisted of seven

questions, including Likert-type evaluative questions as well as specific response and open-ended questions for gathering qualitative data.

Data Analysis Procedures: Much of the data was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Where appropriate, primarily with student surveys, SPSS® software was used to calculate correlations and statistical significance. Likert-type and multiple choice responses were assigned specific numerical values as nominal variables for computational purposes. Free-response or open-ended questions (e.g., responses where we asked respondents to explain “other”) were assessed qualitatively, meaning we allowed categories to sift out from the data rather than imposing preconceived categories. After carefully reviewing and discussing the free responses, we coded free responses to question #7 on the student survey in two ways: (1) as either positive or negative toward peer review and (2) topically (whether the comment focused on the reviewer, etc.). Other free responses were not coded at this time. After agreeing on appropriate categories and defining those categories, both researchers coded the data separately (92% agreement rating) and reached consensus through discussion on disputed codes. We worked to use this study as a preliminary exploration into the numbers of peer review.

⁶ Frankly, we were somewhat dismayed at finding that so few of our own students appreciated the university’s Communication Resource Center (CRC—our writing/speaking center). Tutors in the CRC are undergraduates who were recommended, usually by their first-year Communication Arts’ instructor, to the center’s director. Not surprisingly, such recommendations are based on students’ excellence in writing and speaking assignments during that first-year course. While we believe our tutors offer strong support to fellow students and work collaboratively with fellow students on writing and speaking assignments, we are aware that, as Trimbur points out, undergraduate tutors must learn “to negotiate the conflicting claims on [their] social allegiances” (“Peer Tutoring” 121). This is no small task.

⁷ In the study by McGroarty and Zhu, the student who showed dissatisfaction with peer review was one of a control group of students who received limited training in peer review techniques. The authors then examined the control group’s perception of the peer review process, the validity of group members’ comments on the papers of others, and their teacher’s “feel” for how effective peer review was. Results show that the control group had a generally negative experience in all aspects examined. These student comments seem quite similar to those of our own students. McGroarty and Zhu’s study, however, is most valuable for examining what happens when peer review is taught early on as a skill: students in the experimental group that received extensive instruction in peer review had a far more positive experience.

WORKS CITED

- Asraf, Ratnawati. "Teacher Comments in Teaching Writing: A Critique of Peer Review." *The Gombak Review* 4.1 (1999): 64-82.
- Atkinson, Dwight, and Ramanathan, Vai. "Cultures of writing: An ethnographic comparison of L1 and L2 university writing/language programs." *TESOL Quarterly* 29.3 (1995): 539-68.
- Belcher, Lynne. "Peer Review and Response: A Failure of the Process Paradigm as Viewed from the Trenches." *Reforming College Composition: Writing the Wrongs*. Ed. Ray Wallace, Alan Jackson, and Susan Lewis Wallace. Westport: Greenwood P, 2000. 99-122.
- Brooke, Robert, Ruth Mirtz, and Rick Evans. *Small Groups in Writing Workshops: Invitations to a Writer's Life*. Urbana: NCTE, 1994.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46.7 (1984): 635-52. Rpt. in Villanueva 393-414.
- . *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
- Cahill, Lisa. "Reflecting on Peer Review Practices." Roen et al. 301-06.
- Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. "The Pedagogy of Collaboration." *Singular Texts, Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990. Rpt. in *The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for College Writing Teachers*. Ed. James C. McDonald. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 1996. 53-71.
- Gere, Anne Ruggles. *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.
- Hansen, Jetta G., and Jun Liu. "Guiding Principles for Effective Peer Response." *ELT Journal* 59.1 (2005): 31-38.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Applied Social Research Methods Series 41. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996.
- Miller, Susan K. "Using Group Conferences to Respond to Essays in Progress." Roen et al. 307-18.
- McGroarty, Mary E., and Wei Zhu. "Triangulation in Classroom Research: A Study of Peer Revision." *Language Learning* 47.1 (1997): 1-43.
- Murau, Andrea M. "Shared Writing: Students Perceptions and Attitudes of Peer Review." *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* 9.2 (1993): 71-79.
- Nelson, Gayle L., and John M. Murphy. "Peer Response Groups: Do L2 Writers Use Peer Comments in their Drafts." *TESOL Quarterly* 27.1 (1993): 135-41.
- Nero, S. J. "English is My Native Language . . . or So I Believe." *TESOL Quarterly* 31.3 (1997): 585-92.
- Nystrand, Martin. "A Social-Interactive Model of Writing." *Written Communication* 6.1 (1989): 66-85.
- Paton, Fiona. "Approaches to Productive Peer Review." Roen et al. 290-300.

- Roen, Duane, Veronica Pantoja, Lauren Yena, Susan K. Miller, and Eric Waggoner, eds. *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition*. Urbana: NCTE, 2002.
- Rollinson, Paul. "Using Peer Feedback in the ESL writing class." *ELT Journal* 59.1 (2005): 23-29.
- Roskelly, Hephzibah. "The Risky Business of Group Work." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. 4th ed. Ed. Edward P. J. Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 123-28
- Silva, T. "Toward an Understanding of the Distinct Nature of L2 Writing: The ESL Research and Its Implications." *TESOL Quarterly* 27.4 (1993): 657-77.
- Simkin, Mark G., and Nari K. Ramarapu. "Student Perceptions of the Peer Review Process in Student Writing Projects." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 27 (1997): 249-63.
- Trimbur, John. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." *College English* 51.6 (1989): 602-16. Rpt. in Villanueva 439-56.
- . "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" *The Writing Center Journal* 7.2 (1987): 21-27. Rpt. in *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Ed. Toni-Lee Capossela. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1998. 117-23.
- Villamil, Olga S., and María C. M. de Guerrero. "Assessing the Impact of Peer Revision on L2 Writing." *Applied Linguistics* 19 (1998): 491-514.
- Villanueva, Victor, Jr., ed. *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Urbana: NCTE, 1997.

Copyright of Composition Studies is the property of Composition Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.