Unraveling the History of Your Writing Center

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Questions to ask
- Who might have thought of the original idea of the writing center and why?
- Who might have "owned" the original idea of the writing center?
- Who might have been stakeholders in the original idea (people, departments)?
- Who might have fought the idea?
- How did the writing center fit into larger contexts—writing program, departmental mission, institutional goals?
- What are the ethics of in-house investigating and how do you deal with them (e.g., privacy issues, future relations)?

Potential Sources of Information
- Personnel files
- Your writing center's archives
  - Memos
  - Tutor journals
  - Records
  - Reports
  - Outreach/advertising materials
- Minutes of meetings
  - Department level
  - Curriculum Committee
  - Academic Council
  - Full Faculty
  - Task Forces
- Published histories of the institution
- Personal papers
- Course catalogs
- Yearbooks
- Student newspapers
- Directories/address books
- Public relations materials
- Interviews with key players in the history of your writing center/writing program
- The Writing Centers Research Project at the University of Louisville (archives of other writing centers)

Methods for Making Sense of What You Might Find
- Go back to your original motivation for looking—why did you look in the first place? What did you hope to find? What were your assumptions?
- Focus on the people involved: What is the social history of your writing center?
- Focus on the tensions: What points of conflict have you uncovered? What is the conflict between what you have found and what is commonly believed about your writing center or writing centers in general?
- Focus on the narrative: What is the story of your writing center’s history?
- What do the gaps in what you’ve found—or what you have not found—say about your writing center, about your institution or about the process of understanding history?
- How does what you found fit into what is assumed, known, and believed about writing centers and writing center history (i.e., what’s the bigger picture)?
- How does the history of your writing center compare to/contrast with histories of other writing centers (as found in the Writing Centers Research Project archives)?

1 Alternative title: Uncovering the History of Any Writing Center.