

Keynote Address

Ballroom, 1:30-2:15

No Writing Center is an Island or When the Oasis is a Mirage

Neal Lerner (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Writing centers have long created an identity that is in opposition to the perceived inadequacies of the rest of their institutions. As the account of a 1950 CCCC workshop declared, “The writing laboratory should be what the classroom often is not—natural, realistic, and friendly.” The idea of a writing center as an oasis in the midst of dysfunctional literacy practices is an attractive one and reminds us of why we chose this work and what we might offer to student writers. Still, the oasis metaphor conjures up notions of other powerful cultural oases and islands, whether ones for Gilligan and Skipper or for fantasy or for tests of survival. And the oasis metaphor has also been captured by other cultural forces, including the country’s largest outsourced labor provider, a former affiliate of the world leader in the privatization of prisons. One also wonders for whom the oasis existed in the example of Biswanath Halder, an Indian expatriate whose faith in the written word and counsel from writing center services preceded a tragic ending. Nevertheless, our writing centers do have a great deal to offer our institutions, not necessarily as sanctuaries but as models of teaching and learning practices, an outward-facing oasis open to all.

Plenary Meeting: Ballroom, 2:15-3:00

Conference Adjourns: 3:00, Happy Trails and Safe Travels to You