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One Bad Experience

By Madeline Seller

Heading to class to hand in my first assignment at SUNY Plattsburgh, and I could not be more nervous for the first grade I will receive here. I transferred from SUNY Buffalo for fall semester of 2014, and a lot of my friends told me the professors here were extremely harsh and irrational graders. Don't get me wrong, my professors seem extremely nice so far, but it is only the second week into the semester.

Sitting in my chair, I see Professor Wilson walk in all cheerful and peppy. It is almost torturing me since I feel like I am about to fail. Professor Wilson is a very petite lady with short, salt and peppered colored hair. Although she is a tiny, all-around joyful person, she is extremely intimidating. I haven't put my finger on why yet, but I think it may be something to do with the sarcasm in her voice when she answers questions, or the intelligence that shines through her when she speaks.

She sets her big backpack down and stands cheerfully in front of the classroom.

"I have good news for you all, and it may possibly make me your new favorite teacher this semester," Wilson exclaims while snickering and throwing her hands up in the air.

All I can think about was peer tutoring in the classroom, ugh. One of my 100 level English professors at Buffalo State made us do this with every paper we wrote. I'm pretty sure he thought we all enjoyed it, but it literally made me want to skip class every time we had to, and I know I wasn't the only one. Don't get me wrong, I love having my assignment looked over one last time before it's handed in, but I would rather have it done by someone with more experience than me, not a peer.

Wilson eagerly stares at us as if she is waiting for someone to guess the answer aloud.

“Okay, okay I will just tell you. I am giving you over the weekend to bring your paper to the Learning Center to get tutored. I believe this will help your confidence a lot, as it is your first assignment graded in this class.”

Once class is done, I get up out of my seat and am about to walk out the door when I hear: “Madeline, can you stay for a second to talk!”

Oh yikes, I know I'm not good at hiding my facial expressions. I hope I didn't look uninterested or something during class to offend her. I walk over hesitantly.

“I came to the realization that you are a transfer student this semester when I was looking over my class list.”

“Oh, yes!” I say relieved. “I transferred from Buffalo State. I don’t feel like much of a transfer student though because I am originally from Plattsburgh, plus I am staying in the Special Education program.”

“Oh, wonderful! I was unaware that you were from here, and I am sure that factor makes the transition easier.”

“Yes, it really does!”

“Well what I wanted to talk to you about was the Learning Center. I am sure you had one of those at Buffalo State?”

“Is it anything like a writing center? We had two of those.”

“Yes, it certainly is! Ours is called the Learning Center because it is a tutoring center for a wide variety of subjects. I stopped you because I really wanted to encourage you to go and explore it. All of the tutors there are wonderful and teach me something new when I visit every time. Although I did not make going to the Learning Center mandatory I feel it would be extremely beneficial to you, especially as a brand new student at Plattsburgh State.”

“Thank you for the advice! It wouldn’t hurt to try; I will go right now since this is my last class for the day.”

“Perfect! It is right in the ACC. Please email me if you have any questions or concerns.

Have a good weekend, Madeline!”

“Thank you, you also!” I say as I walk out the door.

I really wasn’t at all nervous to go. I loved the one at Buffalo State, and as an English concentration I went a lot. It always seemed to help me, especially with correcting grammatical errors.

I walk into the Learning Center and the girl at the front desk is extremely friendly and helpful, since I am completely lost.

“Alright, you will be with Karen,” the girl says. She points to the table to the left of her: “She is sitting right at that table of there with the blue ‘writing tutor’ sign.”

I start to walk over, already somewhat confused. At Buffalo State’s writing center it was professors who tutored us, and the girl she directed me to is definitely not since she looks my age. I keep walking over, as I tell myself that I need to give it a chance. I already told my professor I was going right now anyway, so I don’t want to back out now.

I approach the table and wait for her to look up.

“Hello, I’m Maddy! I believe you are tutoring me today,” I say as I shake her hand.

“Yes, I am! My name is Karen. Please, have a seat.”

I sit down in the chair across from her and dig in my backpack for my paper. Once I find it, I hand it to her across the table.

“Is this what you would like to work on today?” Karen asks.

“Yes, it is. It is a paper for my Children’s Literature class,” I respond.

“Okay, do you happen to have the assignment paper with you?”

“Yes, but I actually just wanted you to proofread my paper and look over my grammar.”

“We do not practice the fix-it shop technique at this Learning Center,” Karen says sternly.

Looking at her, I probably seemed like a confused puppy with my head tilted and ears perked up. What the heck is a fix-it shop? I only want the structure of my sentences looked over along with my grammar.

Still staring at her extremely confused, I say, “So does this mean you cannot proofread my paper? Not too sure what the fix-it shop technique is you are mentioning.”

“The fix-it shop model is when you hand your tutor your writing and they proofread it for you, while marking any mistakes made. We don’t use this practice because we don’t want to do

the work for the tutees, or in other words, you.”

At this point, my mouth completely drops. I am all for trying new things, but did she just call me lazy? Or better yet, a cheater? At this point, I am completely annoyed and furious because this isn't at all what I was expecting it to be. I gather my things into my backpack while saying, “I don't think this is going to work.”

After feeling insulted and humiliated, I decide I am going to head over to Dr. Wilson's office and see if she is there. Maybe she could give me an alternative, like for her to revise my paper. After all, this is what I'm used to.

I knock on her door, having it creak open a little ways, and hear her yell, “Come on in!”

“Oh! Hello, Madeline! Are you done at the Learning Center so soon?” Dr. Wilson says while looking at me confused.

“It wasn't anything like I thought it would be, Dr. Wilson.”

“How so?”

“Well first off, at Buffalo State it wasn't peer tutoring; it was professors tutoring students.”

“Oh my, I guess that is a little bit different. It may be more beneficial to you to engage in

peer tutoring. If you think about it, you can go to a professor's office hours anytime for them to look over your assignment, and would not have to go to the Learning Center to do so."

"Well couldn't I just do the same with my peers if I wanted to?" I ask.

"I suppose, but you also need to put into consideration that these writing tutors took a tutoring class to become one. They are not above you, but they might know tutoring techniques to assist you in searching through your own ideas, or may be able to explain grammar errors for you."

"Yeah, I guess that is true. I never really thought of that. I'm also not used to the techniques they use here either. At Buffalo State you would go in and tell them what you want to focus on. Then the professors would mainly go through your paper and mark errors or mistakes."

"Oh, wow. That is completely different! That is not quite the most beneficial way to be tutored. It is almost like getting tutored in math, having them change a step you did on a problem, and then not explaining why."

"When you put it that way, you're right! I never really thought about how I don't learn why my grammar mistake is wrong through them correcting it. I was just really mad how she explained to me that they don't tutor that way. The tutor said, 'We don't use this practice

because we don't want to do the work for the tutees, or in other words, you.'”

“Being devil's advocate, again...” Dr. Wilson says while beginning to smile, “It may have sounded snotty, but I don't think she meant it that way. She may have just been caught off guard and approached the situation wrong. What she was attempting to say is that they don't mark the mistakes for you because they want you to learn for it. Also, she may have been clarifying that you are considered the tutee when she said ‘you.’ She definitely should have approached it differently, but maybe that is a lesson for her!”

“Yeah, maybe I just misinterpreted what she said wrong. I may have also been a little tense because I was told from the very beginning of my session that she could not proofread my paper.”

“But, she should have told you that you were able to proofread the paper together, instead of making it sound right from the start that it was not possible.”

“That probably would have helped!” I say as I laugh a little bit.

“Wow, I'm so happy to see you are feeling a little relieved. I am also very happy that we had this discussion!”

“I am definitely feeling relieved, and I think I am going to go back and give it another

try.”

“Oh, wow that makes me so happy to hear! Please keep me updated on how the second time goes,” Dr. Wilson says ecstatically.

Once again, I walk into the Learning Center and approach the front desk to the really friendly girl who tells me the tutor I’ll be with. How embarrassing to storm out, then come back again asking to be tutored. But I keep repeating in my head that it was only a misunderstanding; plus, Dr. Wilson agreed with me.

“Hello, it’s Madeline, right?” the friendly girl at the front desk says.

“Yes, I was actually wondering if I can try this tutoring thing out again!” I say enthusiastically.

She starts giggling and goes, “Of course you can! Would you like a different tutor?”

“Yes, please. If you don’t mind!”

“No I don’t mind at all! You will be with Shawn who is sitting at the same table you were at before. I hope you have a good session!”

I think it’s safe to say I’m feeling extremely relieved and not judged because the girl seemed to understand. I’m sure she has seen it before, but I don’t want her to think I’m a mean

person because of how I reacted.

I approach the table and my tutor, Shawn, stands up while saying, “I’m Shawn, and will be your tutor for the evening!”

“Great, I’m Madeline!” I say while sitting down in my seat.

I know the drill. I unzip my backpack to not only retrieve my paper, but my assignment sheet as well. I set them down in front of me as I begin to explain what the assignment is, along with the theme of my paper.

“It sounds like you know what you are talking about and that you have a pretty concrete paper. Do you have most of your main ideas developed throughout?”

“Yes, I feel very confident that I do.”

“Okay well how about you read it aloud. That way you may catch a lot of your grammar mistakes, while stopping and looking over other key points in your paper.”

“Yes that sounds like an awesome game plan!” I say relieved.

Right then, I knew it was going to be a successful fifty minutes. I was more than grateful that I went to Dr. Wilson who convinced me to come back. This taught me a lesson: you should never let one bad experience define your opinion.