

The UWC Adapts to the Needs of English Language Learners

The University Writing Center shares the fourth floor of Wilson Hall with the Communication Center and English Language Learner Services. Though they offer three different services, there are many instances when the natures of those services overlap, and they often work together to help JMU students reach their potential. The recent increase in international students at JMU has provided, again, the opportunity.

English Language Learner Services exists to help multilingual students refine their academic English and to help bridge the culture gap many students may experience. Lately, though, with the influx of international students, appointments in ELLS have been filling up, and students have sought out appointments in the Writing Center as well. Working with ELL students is nothing new to Writing Center tutors, but the increased need has caused the UWC to reevaluate its approach,



making sure all students are welcomed and get the specific help they need.

Writing Center faculty member and tutor Karen McDonnell reflects on her approach to writing consultations with ELL students:

"I recall clearly that before I started working in the University Writing Center, I felt very unqualified to work with English Language Learners. So ELL consultations loomed in my mind as a big worry. My fears were quickly

allayed, however, by actually working with ELL writers. I discovered that writers who practice English as their second (or third or fourth) language are seriously motivated and invested learners. Like all writers, each ELL writer

is unique and brings to the table individual strengths. And therefore, I try to approach each writing consultation with an ELL writer in much the same way I approach every consultation: as an opportunity to help shape someone's perception of what it means to write well and to express their ideas with clarity and conviction. It's important to note, too, that I've learned just as much, if not more, from ELL writers as they've learned from me. For example, I've learned how to phrase my questions

and offer suggestions clearly, how quirky the English language can be (with all of its exceptions and idioms), how frequently cultural assumptions underlie writing assignments, and how varied the teaching and learning of writing is from culture to culture. It's been a great privilege over the years to work with many ELL writers. To strengthen our ties, I invite each JMU ELL writer to consider becoming a tutor in the UWC. We have so much to learn from each other."

~Michael Critzer, Graduate Assistant

The Magic Numbers

Wilson Hall consultations: 295
Carrier Library consultations: 62
Online consultations: 4
Total: 361

Workshops conducted: 1
Students and faculty attending: 16
Overall web site hits: 5418
Resource downloads: 14

Total # of writers helped in September: 391



The Diversity of the Writing Center Community

UWC faculty and peer tutors made the trip to the International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing joint conference. Peer tutor Andrea Smith shares observations on her experience.

I walked through the doors of the Sheraton Inn and saw crowds of varying ages, some sporting apparel from universities across the country, all with one thing in common: an interest in writing center work. I was at the NCPTW-IWCA conference, the first professional conference I had ever attended and I also had to present! We told our names to those at the registration table who, then, handed us conference nametags; I felt official. As I walked through the lobby's hallway, I saw professional and peer tutors intermixed, chatting over cups of coffee. I continued forward and found my way into a

large conference room where I sat down facing the panel who was about to present. The panel was made up of professional faculty and peer tutors. Everywhere I looked, I saw differing levels of education, experience, age, and pay, all working alongside one another towards a common goal. I was once again struck by the uniqueness of the non-hierarchical, professional relationships within writing center communities.

Previously, my co-presenters—Karen McDonnell, a professional consultant, and Martin Steger, a fellow peer tutor—and I saw this as a discussion-worthy matter so we prepared a presentation on the topic. We observed that age is not an excluding factor in our writing center, which—through our experiences—we have found to be healthy for all involved. I thought it was valuable that the NCPTW-IWCA conference

enacted this colleague-to-colleague, non-hierarchical model.

-Andrea Smith, Junior/Peer Tutor



Andrea Smith and Martin Steger enjoy Baltimore's Inner Harbor during the conference weekend.

UWC Video Makes Waves at the Conference

Peer Tutor Paul Loman describes the buzz over the popular Youtube music video on our website.

Since publishing our “We Think You’re Gonna Like it Here” musical commercial on our website this summer, the University Writing Center has enjoyed considerable attention within the writing center community. We first shared the

video on the WCenter listserv, where itcenter listserv, where it caught the attention of educators and tutors from around the country. Perhaps most excitingly, Muriel Harris, a well-known writing center theorist and the editor of the Writing lab Newsletter, replied to the post and congratulated us on our entertaining and meaningful commercial.

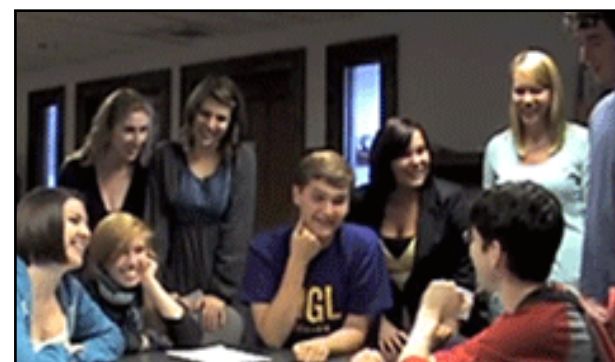
The number of views for the video shot up to over 1,000 within just a few days of the listserv post. Among the responses we received was a request from the International

Writing Centers Association (IWCA) for an article about our video for the IWCA website. Those of us who worked on the video came back together to write an article about our experience.

Jared (UWC coordinator / sound engineer), Martin (peer tutor / videographer), Andrea (peer tutor / actress), and I (peer tutor / creator and director) each wrote a short explanation of our roles in the video process. We met and discussed how the article would work as a whole, made some changes, and now it's off to be published.

Look under “Featured Reading” on the IWCA website in mid-December for our article. (writingcenters.org)

-Paul Loman, Junior/Peer Tutor



Students Relating to Tutors

UWC tutors fall into one of three categories: Faculty, Peer Tutors, and Graduate Assistants. Though each provide quality tutoring, students tend to relate to them in different ways. GA Elysia Balavage discusses the unique place of a graduate assistant in the Writing Center.

Graduate assistants face distinctive trials in the University Writing Center that peer tutors and professional consultants might not necessarily encounter. Students regularly view us with both esteem and perplexity, which can both complicate and enhance our roles as UWC tutors. One challenge I face as a Writing Center GA deals directly with my title—“graduate assistant.” A handful of students I’ve tutored this semester seemed to confuse my responsibilities with the duties of a teaching assistant. Professors often charge TAs with the task of correcting

and grading undergraduate papers, so when I explain to tutees that I’m a guide rather than an editor, and will not simply “correct” mistakes, they can initially appear a bit astonished. As the session progresses, tutees realize that guidance will improve their overall writing skills more effectively than if I were to merely take my red pen and cross out an occasional unnecessary word or two.

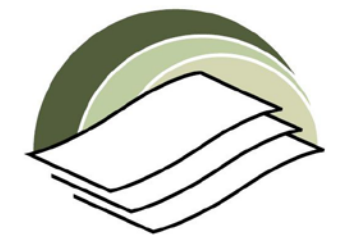
As a GA, I’m also frequently forced (mostly by myself) to ponder my exact place and role in the UWC, which lies somewhere between “peer tutor” and “professional writing consultant.” Even though I haven’t quite figured that out yet, a graduate assistant’s limbo-like position can serve as an advantage instead of a setback. Tutees appreciate that I’m still a student myself, and that I can understand all too well the stress and anguish students suffer while they strive to reach that great milestone

(i.e. a degree). Yet, I have four years of rigorous academic training under my belt, and can therefore offer any applicable insights and helpful hints that I’ve acquired as an undergraduate.

Although students might still confuse graduate assistants with teaching assistants, and continue to view us through skeptical eyes, we play a uniquely invaluable role in assisting tutees in their quest for greater writing abilities.

-Elysia Balavage, Graduate Assistant

University Writing Center
www.jmu.edu/uwc



University Writing Center

The University Writing Center offers

- Free individualized writing help for all students and faculty
- Easy online scheduling system
- Online tutoring for those unable to visit Wilson Hall
- In-class workshops on a variety of writing topics
- Hundreds of writing resources hosted on the UWC web site
- Computer lab and study space
- Faculty consultations for designing assignments and responding to student writing

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