An Evolving Writing Center, 1974-2011

Madison College opened its Writing Lab in 1974 to support first-year students struggling with English Composition. In its first decade, the Lab developed various programs to ensure the success of nontraditional students.

By 1998, when the newly renamed Reading and Writing Resource Center moved to Wilson Hall, James Madison University's enrollment had doubled to more than 14,000 students. The Center's four professional consultants offered specialized tutoring in reading, writing, and English as a Second Language; provided outreach via classroom visits and workshops; and worked with individual faculty members to support General Education courses.

As the founding faculty members retired, JMU created shared faculty positions with other academic units—first with Writing & Rhetoric (now WRTC), then Exceptional Education, and most recently with Media Arts & Design. In addition to consulting with writers in the Center, faculty members began teaching classes and producing scholarship in their disciplines.

In 2006, the renamed University Writing Center expanded support for writing across campus by offering graduate assistantships and scholarly writing workshops for the faculty. The following year, the Center created a course in "Tutoring Writing" (now WRTC 345), which prepared the first cadre of undergraduate peer tutors representing several academic disciplines.

Today's University Writing Center supports writing across campus and beyond. The Center's website provides an extensive Link Library of online resources for writers. Students who cannot easily visit the Center can access help via online tutoring. This year, the Center continues to expand its reach with evening tutoring hours in Carrier Library (and soon in the East Campus Library) and through a new Writing Fellows program that embeds experienced tutors in writing-intensive classes. Via workshops, online resources, and teaching consultations, the Writing Center increasingly supports faculty who teach writing in every discipline.

Beyond the services it provides to JMU's faculty, students, and staff, the University Writing Center has created a community that blurs the boundaries between academic and extracurricular activity, between intellectual and professional

The magic numbers

Wilson Hall consultations: 152
Carrier Library consultations: 5
Online consultations: 0
Total: 157

University Writing Center

Workshops conducted: 4
Students and faculty attending: 179
Overall web site hits: 3191
Resource downloads: 22

Total # of writers helped in January: 358

The University Writing Center
4th floor, Wilson Hall
www.jmu.edu/uwc

development. 22 writing center faculty members—professionals, graduate consultants, and peer tutors—work together to support writers and to advance the teaching of writing. The Center continues to develop as a "laboratory" for studying how writers write, for examining which strategies and assignments work best, and for sharing what we learn with our colleagues across campus.

-Kurt Schick, Director, JMU Learning Centers

Class Visits & Workshops

Our consultants and peer tutors can visit your class to promote Writing Center services or to provide mini-workshops on specific topics. Faculty can contact Paige Normand at normanap@jmu.edu to coordinate a visit.

Cross-Center Tutoring

I thought it would be an easy transition, tutoring for the Communication Center. I had worked as a writing tutor for three years before I was hired as the Writing and Communication Specialist at JMU. I was proficient at helping writers talk through their ideas, assess form and audience, evaluate and integrate evidence, build clear and compelling sentences. I figured, that's most of it, right? I talked with our speech tutors, sat in on half a dozen speech consultations, and learned the Communication ropes. But when the time came for me to tutor solo, I did something very stupid. I tried to write down everything the student said in her speech. I wanted so badly to be able to give her the kind of feedback I was accustomed to giving in writing consultations.
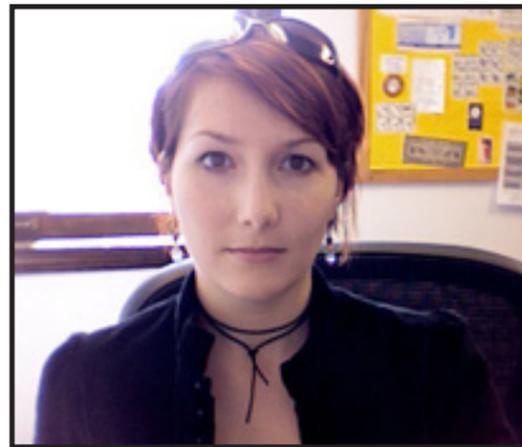
I was so used to words being stones – ones that we carefully carve and stack to build our ideas. And here the words were fleeting. Speeches are ephemeral: sentences, delivery, and tone all change with each

delivery. I realized I was going to have to take a step back, loosen up, and try to see the big picture: sharing ideas doesn't just happen with words and if I just focused on them, I would be missing meaning that comes from the physicality and performance of language. It is a lesson I'm learning all over again as a tutor, the most important lesson: We serve our students best when we put their learning first – before our own pedagogical prerogatives and priorities. At our best, we are not working with writers or speakers but thinkers.

-Paige Normand, UWC and Communication Center Faculty

UWC Article coming to IWCA website

The article by UWC Coordinator Jared Featherstone and peer tutors Paul Loman, Andrea Smith and Martin Steger will appear on the International Writing Centers Association's website this month! http://writingcenters.org

Back in the Swing

As the UWC swings back into gear, students are more than ready for tutoring help. Many of the students coming to the writing center now have been tutored before—repeat tutees from last semester are coming back early this semester to make sure they start off on the right foot with their first assignments. Several of these return students are English Language Learners who appreciate the assistance and input the UWC offers.

In addition, the students from the Tutoring Writing class have been coming to the center, many of them to experience their first tutoring session. Others come with writing that originated outside

the classroom; last week I had a session working with a Peace Corps application essay. Many seniors are bringing grad school application essays to the UWC, hoping to find ways to gain an edge over other applicants. We've been helping a diverse group of tutees, and the semester has only just begun!

Write Nights (late night walk-in tutoring offered in Carrier Library) is starting off slowly, but those who come for tutoring seem to already be aware of the presence of the UWC. On a Thursday night, from our conspicuous UWC sign-in table, we observed some students studying the infamous Write Nights poster. They left once they realized what Write Nights was, but at least

the advertising is getting attention. Those same students might turn up later this semester, needing last minute assistance on a paper. And we'll be there.

The light traffic of the early semester has given the UWC time to get organized, and time for new peer tutors to get settled. A quick glance at the scheduler shows that this grace period is nearing its end. I know other tutors and I are enthusiastic to bring our expertise and insight to the JMU community as Spring 2011 gets underway.
Melissa Sherrill, Senior/Peer Tutor

Photo by Evan McGrew

UWC Peer tutor Melissa Sherrill helps senior Michelle Koob on a paper.

University Writing Center
www.jmu.edu/uwc

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

University Writing Center

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