



University Writing Center

University Writing Center

2017-2021 Strategic Plan

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Process

The previous UWC strategic plan (2011-2014) led up to the center's move from Wilson Hall into the Student Success Center. Because of the number of unknowns associated with this move, UWC leadership decided to wait until they had experienced a year or two in the new space before crafting the next 5-year plan. During that time, the UWC took the first step of revising its Mission Statement and developing a Vision and Values. The first step was to get input from peer tutors, grads, and faculty regarding the UWC's purpose and future goals. Based on this input, the Associate Director drafted revisions of the Mission Statement, along with drafts of the Vision and Values. These revisions were reviewed by the peer tutors, grads, and faculty. The staff input was incorporated into final versions of these guiding statements:

Mission

The University Writing Center empowers students, faculty, and staff to develop writing and critical thinking skills by providing personalized consultations, resources, and programs that strengthen writing across campus.

Vision

To be a leader for the JMU community and the writing centers discipline as they use writing to engage with ideas and audiences.

Values

Personalized Learning – We consider the variety of learning styles and collaborative teaching methods in working with writers.

Inclusivity – We strive to be a safe, comfortable place where people of all backgrounds and groups are treated with respect and kindness.

Mindfulness – We strive to be focused and nonjudgmental in our work by cultivating awareness of mental activity, managing stress, and reducing distraction.

Critical Thinking – We inspire and practice careful analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and expression of ideas.

Connection – We strive to build relationships through understanding, authenticity, and compassion.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the UWC took the following preparatory steps in creating a strategic plan.

1. Reviewed strategic plans from comparable writing centers and read relevant literature on strategic planning for writing centers.
2. Conducted a SWOT analysis of the UWC.
3. Created and distributed surveys to gain input from clients, tutors, and faculty stakeholders.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, UWC faculty drafted and revised strategic planning goals for all programs and services. Planning goals were created in alignment with James Madison University's strategic plan. When possible, the rationale section of each UWC planning goal includes references to the relevant Core Values that underpin JMU's strategic plan.

Services and Staffing Goals

Goal: To increase usage and maximize staffing resources.

Rationale-Although business may increase, wage budget increases are not certain, so we will have to use our resources efficiently.

Methods

Continue to monitor usage and client needs. Adjust staffing and schedule density accordingly.

2017-2018: Record data on usage and create annual survey of client needs and trends (with prize incentive). Develop tracking system for clients turned away due to 100% usage.

2018-2019: Make adjustments to schedule as needed.

2019-2020: Based on client survey data and hiring trends, develop a plan to increase recruitment of nontraditional majors (such as STEM) and desirable groups (multilingual writers, honors students) as tutors.

2020-2021: Assess screening and recruitment efforts; make revisions

Pilot or increase alternative methods of delivery.

2017-2018: Include questions about preferred session length in annual survey of client needs and the appeal of online tutoring. Review current data on "actual length of session."

2018-2019: If appropriate, offer 30 and 60 minute session options and increase the number of online tutoring hours. Add online tutoring training to the opening all-staff meeting and create a guide for the Tutor Resources page.

2019-2020: Review data on session length, client needs, and online tutoring.

2020-2021: Make adjustments as needed.

Develop tracking system to help predict and monitor staffing needs.

2017-2018: Make hiring calculations based on tutor availability (hours per week). Collect information from tutors*. Determine number of hours and tutors needed on staff to meet current client needs.

2018-2019: Make adjustments to systems as needed.

2019-2020: Determine growth projection over time, according to data. Research methods of planning growth for writing centers and other organizations.

2020-2021: Implement growth plan for UWC.

Undergraduate Consultant Training and Development

Goal: To develop a more consistent and robust knowledge base among consultants.

Rationale-Session observations have revealed inconsistencies in both tutoring skill and writing knowledge among undergraduate writing consultants.

Methods

Raising recruitment and hiring criteria

2017-2018: Determine a list of ideal characteristics and skills for incoming tutors through staff discussion, literature review, and survey data (if needed)

2018-2019: Develop a screening system (diagnostic test, DISC analysis/Meyers Briggs, survey questions) to verify characteristics and skills in candidates

2019-2020: Based on applicant trends and research, develop a plan to increase recruitment of nontraditional majors (such as STEM) and desirable groups (ELLs, honors students)

2020-2021: Assess screening and recruitment efforts; make revisions

Tutoring Writing (336) course

2017-2018: revise/define course learning outcomes; determine aspects of the 336 training course that will remain constant across sections; develop standard 15-week 336 hybrid course model

2018-2019: Develop and implement assessment tool (exit exam)

2019-2020: Make revisions to course based on assessment findings

2020-2021: Re-assess or report on findings for an article and/or conference presentation

Develop online training model and apprenticeship to match the rigor of the f2f class.

2017-2018: Review current training modules in Canvas. Determine what can be imported from the current hybrid course and determine additional content that needs to be developed.

2018-2019: Creating additional modules and systems.

2019-2020: Create additional modules and systems.

2020-2021: Pilot self-paced training module on an incoming grad student, faculty member, or peer tutor.

Increasing the rigor of professional development

2017-2018: define pro dev learning outcomes; research pro dev models and approaches from other established WCs; determine a cycle or rotation of important topics over typical span of a tutor's career

2018-2019: Develop and implement assessment tool (tutor observation form to compare fall/spring observations)

2019-2020: Make revisions to pro dev curriculum based on assessment findings

2020-2021: Re-assess or report on findings for an article and/or conference presentation

Goal: To create a culture of professionalism among undergraduate employees.

Rationale-Undergraduates have little training or experience in professional work environments. UWC supervisors see problems with students understanding what it means to act professionally. Creating this culture will not only serve the long-term development of our tutors as they go on to careers or graduate school, but it will enhance the reputation of the UWC within the JMU community.

Methods

2017-2018: Determine ongoing deficits in professionalism among tutors and determine specific expectations with reference to generational and developmental research ; with staff input, revise or amend tutor policy doc to include an explicit tutor code of conduct

2018-2019: Assess and amend code, UWC policies, and peer tutor contracts; Client survey questions that focus on professionalism; tutor observation rubrics that consider professionalism; yearly performance evaluation that includes professionalism

2019-2020: Develop professionalism intervention (readings, activities, speakers) for the Tutoring Writing course as a way to start setting expectations and raise awareness of incoming undergraduate consultants

2020-2021: Assess and amend

Faculty collaboration and development goals

Goal: To develop a University Writing Center Advisory Board that would enable continued dialogue with faculty across disciplines and offer possibilities for collaboration.

Rationale-Faculty recommendations continue to be the top reason students visit the writing center. Our influence on faculty, over time, effects more students than focusing solely on students, who are transient.

Methods

2017-2018: Write a clear description of the role of the advisory board and the UWC's mission to use for recruitment materials. Identify and contact allies of the UWC, including those who have made use of services or have a high number of students coming, in order to set up an initial meeting.

2018-2019: Recruit board members from underserved disciplines and those with whom the UWC does not have faculty allies. Develop a plan for the board.

2019-2020: Continue with projects and meetings.
2020-2021: Continue with projects and meetings.

Goal: Develop, enhance, and promote online faculty resources.

Rationale-Current offerings are not clear or unknown to faculty. We are limited as to how many people we can directly serve with tutoring, consultations, and workshops. The UWC website and Canvas offer ample opportunities to make resources accessible to faculty.

Methods

2017-2018: Determine and prioritize faculty resource needs based on research, WC Online data, and faculty feedback. Redesign Faculty Resources page to make the UWC faculty offerings clear and accessible.

2018-2019: Begin development of new resources based on faculty needs and efficient use of time for UWC faculty. Determine a system for delegation and maintaining workflow of the new resources.

2019-2020: Develop assessment and/or analytics to assess the use of resources; survey faculty to determine if needs are met

2020-2021: Create additional resources or make revisions based on assessment findings.

Goal: Establish goals and programming to develop faculty as writers and teachers of writing

2017-2018: Meet with CFI and/or other programs involved with faculty writing to identify opportunities for collaboration

2018-2019: Conduct research or find existing data to help understand faculty needs

2019-2020: Launch pilot programs or collaborations

2020-2021: Assess faculty development efforts

Goal: Develop and implement plan for systematic faculty collaboration and dialogue.

2017-2018: Investigate statistics about majors and professors who consistently rank in our usage reports. Consider departments or courses that assign writing but do not appear in our statistics. Contact individual faculty or form a focus group to determine faculty receptivity and preferences for collaborating. Research the ways in which other writing centers approach faculty.

2018-2019: Based on the data gathered in year one and the center's mission and vision, develop a plan for systematically approaching or making connections with faculty over time.

2019-2020: Pilot the faculty communication plan.

2020-2021: Assess and revise

Writing Fellows Program

Goal: To expand the Writing Fellows Program

Rationale – Students from all departments at JMU are not currently served by the UWC or by the Writing Fellows Program. Because JMU values “an environment of collaboration across colleges, schools, and departments” (Goal 5D), the UWC has a responsibility to partner more closely with other departments.

Methods

2017-2018: Conduct research and consult experts to determine learning outcomes for tutors, students, and faculty supported and to create a more systematic plan for identifying departments and faculty to support.

1. Review literature to see other methods for administering the program.
2. Identify departments that are underrepresented in the UWC but that assign writing.
3. Meet with departmental stakeholders and/or current allies.
4. Increase funding from outside sources

2018-2019: Implement new system and procedures

1. Recruit tutors from the departments we want to serve through the Writing Fellows Program.
2. Assign a GA, peer tutor, or staff member to assist.
3. Develop specialized training for writing fellows.
4. Assign writing fellows to new departments.

2019-2020: Evaluate data and determine revisions to intervention

1. Tabulate the number of courses and students served.
2. Survey students and faculty who participate in the program.

2020-2021: Implement changes based on assessment findings.

Goal: To develop more robust and consistent assessment efforts of the Writing Fellows program
Rationale – JMU values assessment and seeks to be “a national leader in the assessment of learning” (Goal 1D). Moreover, the viability of the program rests on assessment data.

Methods

2017-2018: Conduct research (e.g., literature review) to see what other writing fellows programs are doing for assessment.

2018-2019: Develop an assessment plan, with the assistance of CARS.

2019-2020: Follow assessment plan to collect data.

2020-2021: Evaluate the assessment plan to determine whether data collected is sufficient, valid, and reliable, and make changes to the plan as needed.

1. Discuss with the Learning Centers director about whether the assessment data are sufficient and useful.
2. Meet with CARS to determine whether the assessment plan is working.

College of Health and Behavioral Studies

CHBS Liaison

Goal: To increase efficiency and effectiveness of liaison efforts to support writing and writing instruction in CHBS

Rationale: Delivering in-class presentations and workshops, as well as out-of-class seminars, has been a key strategy in establishing and maintaining relationships with CHBS faculty and departments. These efforts have not only demonstrated the expertise and value of the UWC Liaison to CHBS, but also afforded opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and one-on-one faculty development. Additionally, they have helped deepen the UWC Liaison’s disciplinary expertise, promote the UWC’s services to faculty and students, and address misconceptions about the Writing Center. Clearly, these efforts are beneficial, but they are also time consuming, and “one-shot” presentations have limited efficacy, compared to other instructional strategies (such as faculty development). A more efficient system for this kind of instructional outreach is needed.

Methods:

1. Systematically prioritize presentation and workshop requests

2017-2018:

- Develop a system for prioritizing presentation and workshop requests (e.g., exposing a population of new students to the UWC or reaching a large number of students)
- Add questions to presentation/workshop surveys to find out a) whether students had seen me present before and b) whether they'd seen the same content in a different presentation

2018-2019:

- Evaluate whether system is working by assessing whether priorities are being met (e.g., number of new students/classes/presentations vs. repeats)

2019-2021:

- Continue evaluating system
- Make changes to prioritization system as necessary

2. When possible and appropriate, “hand off” presentations to faculty

2017-2018:

- Track “repeat customers”
- Create a system for evaluating the pros/cons of visiting the same classes (or giving the same presentation) every semester/year (e.g., when is it beneficial to students, and when is it fostering faculty dependence)

2018-2019:

- Identify cases of faculty dependence and meet with faculty to discuss options
- When appropriate, train faculty members to teach content

2019-2021:

- Follow up with trained faculty to find out whether they are teaching writing content (if so, how's it going; if not, why not)

Goal: To provide opportunities for faculty development in writing instruction, assignment design, and feedback strategies

Rationale: Many CHBS faculty have little or no pedagogical training in writing instruction. Lucy Malenke's study of the state of writing in the Health Sciences found inconsistency in standards for writing and grading practices. Moreover, her study found that many faculty don't use or limit the use of writing in their classes because of large class sizes and heavy teaching loads. However, there but there are strategies that could help them teach and assess writing more efficiently and effectively.

Methods:

1. Hold faculty development events and/or create training resources

2017-2018:

- Administer a survey to CHBS faculty to find out which areas of faculty development are most desired/needed

- Explore opportunities to provide development/training (e.g., symposia, workshop series, online modules) and evaluate pros and cons of each method

2018-2019:

- Hold faculty development events and/or develop training resource(s) (at least 1 per year)
- Track attendance of events or use of resources, and when possible administer satisfaction surveys

2019-2020:

- Develop and administer a mechanism for assessing whether faculty make changes/improvements following events/ use of resources (e.g., survey, follow-up interviews, etc.)

2020-2021:

- Re-administer a survey to CHBS faculty to find out which areas of faculty development are most desired and to assess whether needs have changed

Goal: Sustain writing-in-the-disciplines/scholarship of teaching and learning research in CHBS, and use that research to improve UWC services for writers in those disciplines

Rational: As demonstrated by Lucy Malenke’s “The State of Writing in the Health Sciences Major at JMU” research project, local research helps the Writing Center better understand and serve our clients by improving our disciplinary expertise. Additionally, such research provides opportunities for collaboration between the UWC and CHBS faculty and students.

Methods:

1. Conduct, analyze, and publish results of empirical studies

2017-2018:

- In collaboration with Monica Reis-Bergan, continue collecting and conducting preliminary analysis of data from “Honors Student Writing Approaches Study”

2018-2019:

- In collaboration with Monica Reis-Bergan, complete analysis of data from “Honors Student Writing Approaches Study”
- Draft and revise scholarly article about “Honors student...” study
- Submit article on “Honors student...” study for publication

2019-2020:

- In collaboration with UWC and/or CHBS faculty, identify a new research question and design a study
- Seek out IRB approval for study
- Begin data collection for study

2020-2021:

- Complete data collection for study
- Analyze data for study

2. Use study results to improve tutor training

2018-2020:

- Share findings of “Honors Student...” study with UWC staff
- Discuss with director ways to incorporate findings of "Honors Student..." study into new tutor training (WRTC 336)
- If possible (or relevant), invite tutors to participate in data collection, analysis, or other parts of research process for new study

2020-2021:

- If applicable, share new project progress and finding with UWC staff
- Discuss with director ways to incorporate findings of study into new tutor training (WRTC 336)

Research and Scholarship

Goal: To become a recognized site for research on campus.

Rationale – Undergraduate research is a high-impact practice that JMU values, as stated in Goal 1B: “The university will provide high-impact learning experiences such as undergraduate research, service learning, internships and study abroad programs in a climate that fosters intellectual engagement in and outside the classroom.” JMU also values research and promises to “provide appropriate levels of sustainable support, oversight and accountability for students, faculty and staff engaged in research and scholarship” (Goal 2B, “Core Qualities and Goals”). Research is a part of writing center work (North, 1984), and recent writing center scholars have called for more scholarly agendas (Driscoll & Perdue, 2012; Thompson, 2006).

Methods

2017-2018: Determine research outcomes by meeting with UWC faculty and establishing a coherent research agenda for the Center.

2018-2019: Enact research agenda, with the help of undergraduate and graduate tutors who want to conduct their own research.

2019-2020: Evaluate the success of the research agenda and determine revisions to the plan

- Tabulate the number of research projects and tutors involved in research.
- Survey tutors who have conducted UWC research to learn about their research experiences.
- Survey faculty associates about their experiences conducting research in the Center.

2020-2021: Present research findings at academic events (e.g., workshops, conferences) and in scholarly publications. Inform University stakeholders about research efforts in the UWC.

Goal: To formally assess the UWC’s impact on both tutors and tutees

Rationale – The UWC needs substantive formative assessment to evaluate its programs and make evidence-based changes. Writing center scholars have urged administrators to move beyond “bean counting” and satisfaction surveys (Lerner, 2000) toward more “meaningful” assessments (Thompson, 2006).

Methods

2017-2018: Establish learning objectives for UWC clients and for tutors, and review writing center literature for assessment plans.

2018-2019: Develop an assessment plan that is aligned with the Learning Centers’ assessment plan, with the assistance of CARS.

2019-2020: Implement assessment plan to collect data.

2020-2021: Evaluate the assessment plan to determine whether data collected is sufficient, valid, and reliable.

- Discuss with the Learning Centers director about whether the assessment data are sufficient and useful.
- Meet with CARS to determine whether the assessment plan is working.

Marketing and Promotion

Goal: Improve outreach efforts to better inform students and faculty across campus about the UWC and generate buy-in for our services.

Rationale: Students and faculty hold some misconceptions that prevent them from using (or taking full advantage of) our services. Using outreach efforts to educating students and faculty about the UWC will help ensure that the students who need our services find us. It is especially important that faculty be well-informed about and supportive of our services, because many students visit the Writing Center based on a faculty recommendation. Furthermore, improving our relationship with faculty may provide unique opportunities for collaboration and research, as well as tutor recruitment.

Methods:

Encourage use of UWC Promotional Video

2017-2018:

- Reach out to faculty via mass emails and announcements (when possible) and encourage them post the UWC Promotional Video to Canvas or play in their classes (as we can only offer a limited number of in person Intro Presentations)
- When faculty request UWC Intro Presentations, encourage them to use the video
- Track usage of video on YouTube (semester by semester)
- Add question to client surveys to find out if UWC users have seen the video

2019-2021:

- Assess usage statistics, and if necessary, make additional promotional efforts, such as visiting faculty meetings, personally emailing department heads, etc.
- Continue tracking usage of the video on YouTube and via client surveys
- Continue promoting video via efforts that boost video views

Make more systematic use of social media

2017-2018: Using information gathered from meetings with other sites on campus (libraries, UREC) and considering software and human resource issues, develop a plan to consistently promote through social media

2018-2019: Pilot social media plan

2019-2020: Conduct assessment of social media plan

2020-2021: Revise social media plan according to assessment findings

Optimize free e-billboard opportunities

2017-2018: Determine most appropriate places on campus for e-billboard advertising; create list of contacts and timeline for sending slides

2018-2019: Pilot e-billboard plan and add to administrative calendar

2019-2020: Conduct assessment of e-billboard plan

2020-2021: Revise e-billboard plan according to assessment findings

UWC Website

Goal: to maintain and develop an accessible website that effectively represents the UWC's mission, services, and resources as it engages diverse UWC constituencies.

Rationale: The UWC website is/can be an important resource for a number of different constituencies: JMU student writers with their different concerns and writing projects; JMU faculty looking for instructional assistance; JMU faculty and staff with their own writing concerns and projects; JMU administrators; the larger JMU community; and non-JMU site visitors; as well as current and past UWC consultants. We can organize and deepen our attention to these constituencies through concerted attention to creating an intuitive, consistent, updated site that is textually and visually appealing and complies with web accessibility guidelines. This goal aligns with JMU core qualities 1B, 3B, and 5D.

Methods:

2017-2018:

- Continue updating/revising existing website (language, images, and navigation)
- Survey different constituencies for feedback regarding the site's content and organization, perhaps in conjunction with other UWC surveys
- Request and analyze site analytics
- Add a page (or subpages) with links to past UWC annual reports

2018-2019:

- Continue updating/revising existing website (language, images, and navigation)
- Prioritize and act on needs as determined by internal decisions, feedback, and analytics
- Create faculty and staff resources page(s) to more fully address teaching and scholarship needs

2019-2020:

- Continue updating/revising existing website (language, images, and navigation)
- Prioritize and act on needs as determined by internal decisions, feedback, and analytics
- Create a page community page that reflects the UWC's support for writing across the wider JMU and Harrisonburg community

2020-2021:

Goal: Develop an up-to-date suite of online resources that answers JMU student and faculty needs and that features a growing number of UWC-created resources

Rationale: The UWC’s “Online Writing Tips and Resources” suite, housed on the UWC website, can serve as a trusted resource for JMU researchers and writers across the disciplines. It can serve as outlet for UWC professional development efforts and scholarship as it serves as a showcase for the center’s commitment to its mission, vision, and values. This goal aligns with JMU core qualities 1B, 3B, and 5D.

Methods:

2017-2018:

- Devote professional development time to examining, evaluating, and updating the UWC’s existing “Online Tips and Resources” language and resources
- Survey other writing centers’ online resources
- Survey JMU student and faculty needs
- Request and analyze site analytics
- Consider seeking input regarding a usability study
- Develop recommendations regarding organization, media, and style
- Develop recommendations regarding oversight and quality control
- Develop recommendations regarding priorities to ensure that future efforts are coherent/focused

2018-2019:

- Devote professional development time to examining, evaluating, and updating the UWC’s existing “Online Tips and Resources” language and resources
- Establish an oversight/quality control committee (perhaps staffed or led by graduate students or interns)
- Establish templates for different media, including style guides to ensure consistency in terms of purpose, voice, formatting, and style
- Devote professional development time to the effort, offering training and resources
- Begin acting on recommendations regarding existing resources (e.g., add, simplify, reorganize, or rewrite).
- Run a pilot effort targeted at developing a select variety of in-house efforts with regular due dates.

2019-2020:

- Devote professional development time to examining, evaluating, and updating the UWC’s existing “Online Tips and Resources” language and resources
- Devote professional development time to the effort, offering training and resources
- Run a usability study

- Survey students and faculty and examine website analytics for feedback and new needs
- Assess progress and affirm, update, or revise recommendations for future work

2020-2021:

- Devote professional development time to examining, evaluating, and updating the UWC’s existing “Online Tips and Resources” language and resources
- Devote professional development time to the effort, offering training and resources

Community Outreach

Main Goal:

To create a culture of community service among undergraduate and faculty tutors where they volunteer tutoring hours in service of local constituents beyond JMU—local communities, ESL writers, refugee families, and community college students.

Rationale:

As our conversations with community organizations locally have revealed, writing happens beyond the confines of higher education. There is a strong need for language and writing support in the community (e.g., ESL speakers, refugee families), and, in particular, in community colleges nearby. Our interest further aligns with James Madison University’s Engagement goals (see link below), namely with the University’s concern in having our students learn engagement on site (5A), in fostering connections with community partners (5B), and in expanding services offered on campus (5C). On these University goals, the UWC offers a suitable ground for tutors to apply writing pedagogies learned with us in service of families and community college students as they transition into larger occupational spaces (former) and into JMU (latter). Creating this culture will instill in our tutors a sense of responsibility and service toward others, and a deeper understanding of writing as it takes place in daily life, beyond academic demands. Ultimately, tutors will be modeling scholarly behaviors for the community. Such culture will further strengthen the UWC, as it contributes directly to University goals.

<https://www.jmu.edu/jmuplans/corequalities/core-quality-5.shtml>

Methods:

2017-2018. Brainstorm with UWC staff and tutoring writing students to determine possible service work. Connect with Community Service Learning office to determine possible service opportunities for the Tutoring Writing class.

2018-2019: Implement pedagogical unit on community service during incoming-tutor training. Unit should be part of course tutors take. Implement segment on community service during interviews.

2019-2020: Assess community service component of tutor training and UWC tutor culture. Determine revisions for training.

2020-2021: Implement new plans based on assessment and tutor input.

