University Writing Center

2014-2015 Annual Report

Presented by:
Jared Featherstone, Associate Director
Laura Schubert, Peer Education Coordinator
Lucy Green, Writing Instructor
Carolyn Schubert, Library Fellow

UWC Annual Report

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.

New Developments

The Student Success Center

This year, the UWC moved into the Student Success Center where we established our new main location after being in Wilson Hall for 15 years. In the SSC, we had more space, the potential to have longer hours, and increased visibility. Because we did not see a substantial increase in tutoring hours, we had to settle for thinner coverage over a longer stretch of time. In order to match the schedule of our busy neighbors, the SMLC, we expanded hours to be open 10-8 Mon-Thurs, 10-2 Fridays, and 5-8 Sundays.

Early in the fall semester, we noticed an increase in our walk-in traffic, and this trend continued. For the fall in the SSC, we saw a 256% increase in walk-in traffic from the previous fall in Wilson Hall. This quickly led to tutor burnout and stress, leading me to change the way I assign walk-in hours for the spring. Basically, I spread the walk-in shifts out over more tutors instead of designating certain tutors as walk-ins.

Aside from the compromised tutoring budget, the new location has been great for tutors and tutees. The variety of workspaces within our location allows tutors to fulfill our mission of customizing sessions to meet learning needs. We've been able to use the flat screen for group-written papers, and we've had the space to bring entire classes to the center.

Two emerging trends are the increase in adult learners using the UWC, and the use of the UWC as a writing space. This year, several adult learners have become regular users of the UWC, which has presented some challenges, particularly for undergraduate peer tutors. Because these are adults, the peer tutors have trouble relating to them and feeling confident enough to advise them. The adults are sometimes demanding and push the tutors to extend beyond their typical practices. Some tutors have expressed discomfort about this situation, which has led us to consider addressing adult learners in tutor training and professional development.

Adult learners and other students have started to use the UWC as not only a place to get writing help, but also a place to get writing done. With our increased space, we can accommodate writers who want to write or revise at the UWC. In some cases, this has led to overuse of the center. One particular client would camp out to work and then pester tutors throughout the day. In collaboration with the Office of Disability Services, we worked out a system for that particular client.

New Faculty Member and CHBS Outreach
This year, Lucy Green joined the UWC writing faculty. Her responsibilities included tutoring, assisting with tutor training and professional development, consulting with faculty

on writing instruction and assignment design, and coordinating presentations and workshops across campus. Moreover, she served as liaison to the College of Health and Behavioral Studies (CHBS), with the specific goal of discovering ways for the UWC to meet discipline-specific writing needs within that College. In this role, she networked with faculty, spoke at departmental and college-wide meetings, developed tailored presentations, consulted on the new Health Sciences curriculum, coordinated a seminar and faculty panel on writing personal statements, and taught a class for CHBS seniors in the final semester of their honors projects.

A summary of Lucy's outreach work can be found in the table below.

Class/Group	Enrollment/Attendance	Professor	Presentation/Workshop Description
FALL 2014			
ASP Peer Instructors	10	Renee Bernier	Interactive career development workshop, with tips for writing cover letters and personal statements, and suggestions for incorporating ASP experience into those documents
CHBS / Pre-professional Health	90	N/A	Strategies for writing personal statements and faculty panel discussion
CHEM 481	40	Barbara Reisner	The writing process for review papers
CSD	7	N/A	Guided peer review workshop for personal statements
HTH 408 (x2)	41	Stephanie Baller	Essay revision and editing workshop
HTH 351 (x2)	91	Stephanie Baller	Strategies for composing effective arguments in scientific writing
HTH 351 (x2)	91	Stephanie Baller	Essay revision and editing workshop
NSG 350 (x2)	90	Donna Trimm	Strategies to avoid plagiarism, discussion of summary/paraphrase/quotations, intro to APA style
NSG 390	45	Chris Maphis	Guided peer review workshop for chronic illness paper
NSG 450	90	Linda Sobel	Strategies for writing integrative reviews
RN-BSN Orientation	35	Nena Powell	Introduction to science writing, reading scholarly articles, thesis statements, and APA style.
Doctoral Psychology	6	Anne Stewart	Application essay strategies for post-graduate internships
Psychological Sciences MA students	90	Michael Hall	Types of literature reviews in psychological sciences and strategies for writing them
SPRING 2015			
HTH 150 (x3)	163	Tim Howley	"The Writing Situation" (audience, purpose, and genre)in the Health Sciences
KIN 655	9	Chris Womack	Discussion in the empirical research paper
NSG 350 (x2)	90	Donna Trimm	Strategies to avoid plagiarism, discussion of summary/paraphrase/quotations, intro to APA style
NSG 390	45	Chris Maphis	Guided peer review workshop for chronic illness paper
NSG 450	90	Linda Sobel	Strategies for writing integrative reviews
PSYC 211	36	Kethera Fogler	Argument in the empirical research paper
PSYC 825	6	Debbi Bandalos	Revising empirical journal articles
SMAD Senior Seminar	17	Dolores Flamiano	Strategies for research writing

Sharepoint Database Development

In collaboration with our Library Fellow and IT, we've piloted a new database system using Sharepoint. The idea is to eventually replace WC Online with our own, customized, free system. We piloted the Sharepoint database in our Rose Library and Athletic Performance Center locations during the Spring 2015 semester. The intake and client report forms were designed with input from tutors and faculty, considering ways to streamline the sign-in process for walk-in tutoring and to give the UWC clean, manageable session data.

By converting most of the forms to checkboxes, pull-down menus, and restricted text fields, we made the forms easier to fill out. Students can no longer make mistakes with course names or professor names. Student information automatically populates the fields once an E-ID is entered because the Sharepoint system communicates with Peoplesoft.

Based on tutor input, we've made several revisions to the forms, and we will continue to do so until it is ready to use more broadly at the UWC.

UWC Cascade Website

The UWC worked with JMU Information Systems to completely redesign the UWC website for JMU's Cascade platform. After the new site went live early in the academic year, the UWC refined site navigation, updated existing pages—including all "Opportunities" pages—and added new resources for JMU faculty and students. The redesigned front page features the UWC Twitter feed, links to UWC-written news stories, a video introducing the UWC's new home in the Student Success Center created by UWC tutors in collaboration with CIT, and links to two videos on writing personal statements created by the Writing Center Liaison to the College of Health and Behavioral Studies.

MAWCA 2015

This spring, the UWC hosted the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association conference in the Student Success Center at JMU. With nearly 300 participants from around the region, the event increased our writing center's visibility and established many connections with other centers. The conference theme, Sharing Spaces, reflected our move to the Student Success Center, a move that many writing centers are making these days. The UWC staff participated in every aspect of the planning and facilitation of the conference. Peer tutors Caroline Prendergast, Kody Sharp, and Taylor O'Donnell all gave presentations at the conference. Faculty members Kevin Jefferson, Lucy Green, Jared Featherstone, and Laura Schubert also gave presentations or conducted workshops. Feedback from the MAWCA board and conference surveys indicates it was a success.

Mission, Vision, Values

Using the executive leadership training received in the Impact[3] Program, the UWC's Associate Director facilitated the revision of the UWC's mission statement and the creation

of a vision statement and values. The process began by recording the discussions and input from peer tutors and grads regarding the UWC's purpose and future goals. The Associate Director then drafted a revision of the mission statement and drafts of vision and value statements. These revisions were reviewed by the peer tutors, grads, and faculty. The comments were 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.

The new mission, vision, and values will guide the creation of the UWC's strategic plan.

Ongoing Programs

Writing Fellows

The program supported four sections of two engineering courses this year: Engineering Design III and Engineering Design V. The program's funding source could only support these four writing fellows placements, which was an unfortunate decline from last year's expansion. Still, the program significantly enhanced writing instruction in these courses, as demonstrated in an assessment project conducted by Kevin Jefferson and Laura Schubert. They conducted a pilot research project designed to assess the impact of one writing fellow's instruction. They collected literature reviews that students wrote in three sections of the same engineering course, one of which had a writing fellow

embedded in the class. They blindly rated nearly 40 essays and found in preliminary analyses that students who worked with a writing fellow wrote better essays. These students' essays had higher trait scores, and their revisions showed greater attention to global concerns, such as organization and source usage. This project received IRB approval in March to continue researching on a greater scale.

Faculty who participated in the writing fellows program also demonstrated their satisfaction with the program when they presented, along with their writing fellows, on a conference panel at the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association in April. The four panelists described their positive experience collaborating to enhance writing instruction in engineering and encouraged conference attendees to negotiate similar arrangements at their institutions. At this same conference, peer tutor Caroline Prendergast also described research she conducted as part of her writing fellows assignment in the psychology department.

Peer Tutor Development

We improved last year's professional development activities by organizing regular all-staff meetings, instead of small-group meetings. The all-staff meetings allowed us to increase unity among all writing center personnel, to improve communication, and to streamline professional development efforts. During the meetings, we discussed regular UWC business, communicated announcements, and held debriefing sessions where tutors could share tutoring successes with each other and troubleshoot challenges. We also invited several guest speakers to lead group meetings on specific topics, such as diversity, research writing, and APA citation style. A highlight of the year was Art Dean's two presentations and activities that engaged tutors in discussions about diversity. Tutors reported that the activities were useful, interactive, and interesting. We recorded one of the sessions to use again in the future, perhaps with students in the Tutoring Writing course.

Tutor Awards Ceremony
    The UWC participated in the Learning Centers Tutor Awards Ceremony, honoring Dakota Sharp, Caroline Prendergast, Kristin Gatti, Alison Walsh, Alexa Livezy, Adrian Jarvis, and Allison Michelli.

Scholarly Contributions
- Kevin Jefferson and Laura Schubert conducted a pilot research project that sought to assess the impact of a writing fellow's instruction. They collected literature reviews that engineering students wrote in three sections of the same course, one of which had a writing fellow embedded in the class. They blindly rated nearly 40 essays and found in our preliminary analyses that students who worked with a writing fellow wrote better essays. These students' essays had higher trait scores, and their revisions (which we evaluated by rating both first and second drafts) showed greater attention to global concerns. They received IRB approval in March to continue this research project on a greater scale.

- Laura Schubert presented with Karen Johnson a workshop entitled "Writing Center in the Learning Commons: Opportunities, Pitfalls, and Administrative Strategies" at the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association – Harrisonburg, April 2015.

- Jared Featherstone, along with ODS Assistant Director Matt Trybus, facilitated a 2-hour workshop entitled, "Writing Centers and Disability Services: Collaborating to Empower" at the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association Conference, April 2015. James Madison University.

- Lucy Green began an IRB-approved empirical study of The State of Writing in the Health Sciences Major at JMU. She conducted surveys and interviews with CHBS faculty, and she will begin analyzing data this summer. Preliminary results show that the project will be fruitful:

  > -Only 35% of respondents reported feeling that their students are prepared to do the writing required of them in their classes.
  > -A mere 20% of respondents agreed that students who graduate with a Health Sciences major are adequately prepared for the writing they will do in graduate school or in their professions. No respondents strongly agreed, and 80 percent gave a negative or neutral response to this item.
  > -95% of respondents reported that they encourage their students to visit the University Writing Center, and 60% confirm that they have students who've visited the UWC.
  > -However, 35% said they do not know or are not sure what services the UWC offers students and faculty.

Assessment

Usage and Impact

The University Writing Center held 3011 appointments during the 2014-2015 academic year. Due to the opening of the Student Success Center, the UWC closed down its Carrier Library satellite. The Rose Library and Athletic Performance Center locations remained open. The breakdown of writing consultations by location is as follows:

Fall 2014

Total appointments: 1664
    SSC appts: 1152
    SSC walk-ins: 352 (compared to 99 in Fall 2013. That's an increase of 256%.)
    Rose: 101
    APC: 26

    SSC appointment usage: 82.5%
    SSC walk-in usage: 28%
    Rose usage: 22%

APC usage: 8%

Spring 2015

Total appointments: 1347
        SSC appts: 1100
        SSC walk-ins: 198
        Rose: 35
        APC: 14

        SSC appointment usage: 75.5%
        SSC walk-in usage: 12%
        Rose usage: (not available through Sharepoint)
        APC usage: (not available through Sharepoint)

Client Surveys

Following each tutorial, students are emailed a post-session survey. We have observed that this method is the best means to elicit feedback from UWC clients. This year, we've collected a total of 377 post-session surveys. The most valuable results from this survey illustrate that we are fulfilling one of our mission-statement objectives: 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.

The post-session surveys indicated:

-93% of respondents felt that the advice they received from their tutor was "useful" or "very useful."

-96.5% of respondents felt more prepared to write or revise their paper following the session.

-92% of respondents stated that they learned something about writing that they could apply to future writing tasks.

These post-session surveys are reviewed regularly and incorporated into weekly emails and professional development meetings. Accordingly, client feedback is immediately addressed in our writing center practice.

The post-session survey results also show that professor recommendation continues to be our number one reason why students visit the center. Knowing this, we will continue connecting with campus faculty.

WC Online Session Report Research

Laura Schubert conducted a pilot research project to assess the language that tutors use to describe their work with English Language Learners (ELL). Laura used methods from discourse analysis to study semantic prosody, or language connotations, which enables researchers to analyze words' positive, negative, and neutral connotations. This method of discourse analysis allowed her to detect tutors' connotations of ELL students—as reported in their WC Online session reports—and to see whether they associated ELLs with lower-order writing concerns.

Laura found that in 38% of the first 50 occurrences of the term *ELL* in session reports, the term carried neutral semantic prosody. In 30% of the occurrences, *ELL* carried positive semantic prosody, and in 32% of the occurrences, *ELL* carried negative semantic prosody (See pie chart). Most notably, the results show a higher frequency of negative semantic prosody compared to positive semantic prosody. For instance, negative semantic prosody appears in passages like,

- "Writing is full of the familiar <u>ELL</u> concerns, to the point that her intended meaning is sometimes impenetrable."
- "As an <u>ELL</u> student, [the tutee] had trouble understanding how to make her writing less mechanical. In this particular assignment, the introduction was very blunt and cold."

Tutors' Connotations of *ELL*
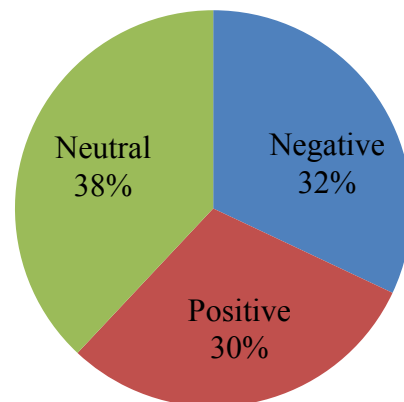
Additionally, tutors referenced the word *grammar* (or a grammatical term) near *ELL* 36 times. That is, *grammar* was a collocate of *ELL* 72% of the time, suggesting that tutors may associate ELLs with grammatical assistance. However, we are cautious in interpreting these preliminary results because negative semantic prosody does not necessarily imply tutors' negative associations with ELLs, as scholars like Al-Sofi et al. (2014) have demonstrated.

These findings inspired us to include more tutoring training surrounding diversity, particularly to invite Art Dean to guest speak in two tutor development meetings. This pilot study also suggests that these research methods are useful for studying tutors' language use and perceptions. We plan to conduct a more formal study with IRB approval in the future.

Conclusions

The writing center continues to be committed to high quality services, strategic growth, and original research. We look forward to continuing our role in facilitating Writing-Across-Campus initiatives, and are particularly excited to see how our new location at the Student Success Center will increase our visibility and subsequently our impact at James Madison University.

Approval

Learning Centers Director:		**Date:**	/ /
UWC Coordinator:		**Date:**	/ /