

# UWC MONTHLY

A publication of the James Madison University Writing Center

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## Seasoned and aspiring tutors come together for professional development

Since the center began employing peer tutors in 2008, students wishing to apply for work at the University Writing Center have been required to take the WRTC 345 Tutoring Writing course in preparation for the tutoring world. This semester, Laura Schubert, Peer Education Coordinator for the UWC, is the lead instructor for the class and has initiated some changes to the curriculum.

New in the course this semester is an experiential learning component. In the past, the class has been held twice a week. This semester, WRTC 345 is scheduled to meet three times a week; however, class is only held twice, and the third meeting time is substituted with professional development meetings with UWC tutors. These groups meet once a week for one hour to hold discussions concerning the continuing development and improvement of tutoring practices in the UWC.

The meetings have come a long way since Kurt Schick, Learning Centers Program Director, taught the first WRTC 345 section in Fall 2007 and started the professional development program with the first batch of UWC peer tutors. The

meetings were initially held as one large group to discuss the progress and content of tutoring sessions.

By 2009, undergraduate peer tutors from the First Year Involvement writing center housed in Huffman Hall had joined the UWC's professional development group.

As the number of tutors in the group grew, meetings began to take on more structure. Articles were assigned for discussion, and content was streamlined to take a more formal approach, but the group now faced a problem—it had grown too large.

“As the staff grew, we were led to form smaller groups because not everybody could speak in meetings so large,” said Laura Schubert, Peer Education Coordinator. “It was hard to find time for everybody. The smaller groups allow more interaction amongst peer tutors and they're easier to manage, logistically.”

In 2011, Schubert and Jared Featherstone, University Writing Center Coordinator, took charge and created a program that involved smaller development groups.

This semester, along with the addition of the WRTC 345 students to the groups, the formal structure of the meetings changed in favor of group-led agendas and decision-making. Each group has been instructed to select roles for certain members, including group leader, discussion facilitator, and writer who records the minutes of each meeting for Schubert to review.

So far, changes to the professional development curriculum have been positively received. Kirstyn Nutter, a WRTC 345 student, says the professional development meetings have helped her “become more familiar with the center and the people who are already a part of it. The meetings give prospective tutors a new insight on what really goes on in the center. It's nice to meet with the tutors and to hear about experiences they have.”

Adjustments to the WRTC 345 and professional development curriculum have been seen every semester. We can expect further changes in coming semesters as the staff looks for new ways to continue the improvement of tutoring services.

*-Sam Nowak, Peer Tutor*



## The Magic Numbers

Wilson Hall consultations: 357

Carrier Library consultations: 76

East Campus Library: 39

Total: 472

Workshops conducted: 6

Students and faculty attending: 327

Overall web site hits: 7,939

Resource downloads: 78

Total # of writers helped in January: 877



University Writing Center

## Peer Tutors accept the challenges of online tutoring

Online tutoring, offered by the University Writing Center since 2009, is typically handled by faculty tutors. However, this semester two peer tutors—seniors Genevieve LeFranc and Paul Loman—have taken the opportunity to expand their tutoring skills in the online format. LeFranc admits, “At first I was apprehensive about online tutoring, but I enjoyed it and I feel more confident about trying this new tutoring style.”

Offered on a limited basis, the University Writing Center’s online tutoring service assists a variety of students, both on campus and off. Students who qualify for this service include those who have full-time work schedules, long commutes to campus, physical injury, and those who study abroad. Because online tutoring is used by students for whom time is scarce and scheduling is difficult, the UWC does not provide real-time interaction. Instead, students submit papers and receive a feedback form from a tutor within 48 hours.

LeFranc explains that the experience not only helped her develop her online tutoring skills, but her skills in face-to-face

consultations as well. “After this experience, I am much more aware of the importance of balancing the writer’s concerns with my own concerns in all my sessions—both online and in person.”

Paul Loman feels similarly about his experience. “It is quite different from my consultations in Wilson, but overall, I learned a lot from tutoring online.”

Loman admits that online tutoring can be challenging at times, especially since the writer is not available for instant feedback. “Since the student is not present in online sessions, I have to make sure that I use the appropriate tutoring style. It can be very easy to slip into a copy editor role, but that is not the goal of the session—I want to empower the writer, not just blindly correct mistakes.”

As the development of the UWC continues, our hope is to provide even more support to writers, whether on campus, off campus or abroad. Online tutoring works to do just that.

*-Brooke Covington, Peer Tutor*

## UWC continues to mentor other Virginia writing centers

Writing centers from other universities have taken an interest in visiting the UWC to gain insight about how a larger center functions. Recently, writing center coordinators and peer tutors from Eastern Mennonite University and Longwood University visited the UWC.

Though the UWC acts as a mentor center to these smaller universities, sharing tutoring strategies and marketing ideas is beneficial for everyone involved. During EMU’s visit to the UWC, peer tutors were able to engage in conversation about differences in center styles and typical tutoring sessions.

“I knew that there would be many differences between our centers because of size, but it was interesting to learn some of the similarities,” said peer tutor Brooke Covington.

One of the similarities is the prerequisite course to become a writing tutor. After talking with other tutors and briefly touring the UWC in February, the three EMU peer tutors observed sessions in the center.

Longwood University, who visited last year, made a return trip to the UWC in February as well, bringing a new crew of tutors. During this visit staff from both centers had lunch at the Madison Grill, took a tour of the UWC and the satellite location in Carrier, and participated in the Tutoring Writing class.

Coordinators and peer tutors of both writing centers shared their tutoring experiences during lunch. Peer tutor Caroline Prendergast was in the Tutoring Writing class and participated in the panel last time Longwood visited our campus. “It was

interesting to get to talk with them at two different points in my professional development,” said Prendergast. “We got to talk a lot about expanding clientele and other strategies we’ve used to make our center more visible and accessible to students on campus.”

Longwood seemed interested in programs offered by the UWC, like Faculty Fellows and the Tutoring Writing course, which have not yet surfaced at their own center. Tutors were able to discuss resources, and Longwood tutors mentioned using the



Visitors from Longwood University’s writing center enjoy a lunchtime discussion with UWC staff.



UWC's Link Library for their own sessions.

The tour following lunch was a chance for Longwood to see where and how the UWC works Write Nights at the libraries. They also saw the different workspaces and technologies available for sessions in the Wilson Hall Center.

It was during the Tutoring Writing class that tutors were able to offer one another advice and exchange ideas through mock tutoring sessions. The class was split into three small groups that included the Longwood representatives for a more engaging experience. The class instructor, Laura Schubert, felt the mock sessions were successful.

"In our group, we had stimulating conversations after each mock session that gave everyone an opportunity to talk about best practices and ways of handling challenging sessions. The sessions also gave aspiring tutors a chance to practice in a safe setting and to receive some useful feedback," said Schubert.

## From peer tutoring to corporate marketing

Since her graduation in May 2009, Amy Drewes has been implementing her knowledge of formal writing, grammar rules, basic spelling and etiquette—learned from her University Writing Center tutoring days—at her career as a Marketing Associate with ecVision in New Jersey.

"With a society dominated by young adults plugged into technology, texting and fast-pace satisfaction, the art and understanding" of these skills is a rarity, said Drewes.

It's also what set her apart from other applicants. In every



Former peer tutor Amy Drewes now works in marketing.

interview that Drewes has had since her graduation, the interviewers have never failed to mention that they were impressed by her tutoring experience, and that it was a valuable skill that could be used in their office.

The mix of current Longwood tutors with prospective JMU tutors created a great environment for feedback.

For each of the centers, the visits were a positive experience. Showing the smaller centers what the UWC has accomplished in terms of outreach on campus, expansion, and tutor development helped to spark ideas for their own centers. Overall, spending time with other tutors is beneficial for everyone. In fact, UWC Coordinator Jared Featherstone and Longwood Director Kristen Welch have co-authored an article about mentorship between centers.

"It's great to see how collaborative learning, a concept so central to writing center work, can happen not only in tutoring sessions, but in the interactions that occur between two writing centers," said Featherstone. "We hope to continue connecting with other writing centers."

-Courtney Wood, Peer Tutor

"Showing a potential employer that you have the ability to write as a professional is absolutely invaluable," said Drewes.

Some of the most rewarding experiences Drewes had at the UWC involved her sessions with English Language Learner students. Her company's largest office is in Hong Kong, where a handful of employees communicate with Drewes on a regular basis. Having the experience of working with multilingual students allowed her to learn the various lessons with cross-language issues.

"I have been able to better interpret email communications coming from our Hong King office, which has allowed me to improve productivity with the team as well as my working relationship with them," said Drewes.

She is also able to provide guidance and occasional explanations for her Hong Kong colleagues in order to assist them in improving their understanding of the English language—"So I still sneak in a little tutoring here and there as time permits," said Drewes.

Drewes also said that her two years as a tutor helped her develop her people skills, teacher skills, professionalism, honesty, and an in-depth understanding of the written word.

"These are all résumé builders, but they also are personal skills that come in handy when you least expect it," said Drewes. "To paraphrase American Express, it's priceless."

-Cat Elsby, Peer Tutor

UWC Monthly  
Editorial Director: Jared Featherstone

Editor: Cat Elsby

Copy Editor: Brooke Covington

Photo Editor: Evan McGrew

Design Editor: Siobhan Doheny

Writers: Courtney Wood, Cat Elsby, Justin Thurston, Sam Nowak

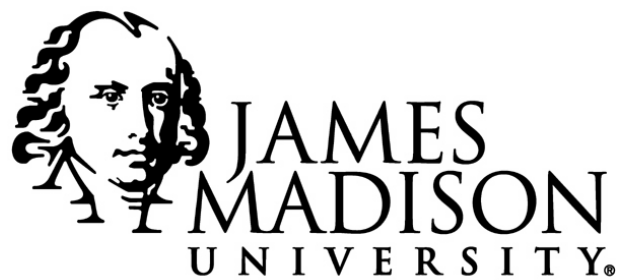
**University Writing Center**  
www.jmu.edu/uwc

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



UNIVERSITY WRITING  
CENTER

MSC 1007  
951 Madison Drive  
Wilson Hall, Room 417  
Harrisonburg, VA 22807  
540.568.6967 Phone  
540. 568.3450 Fax  
feathejj@jmu.edu

[www.jmu.edu/uwc](http://www.jmu.edu/uwc)

