

Tutors Across Borders

Climbing down a ditch behind shack houses to pull plastic bags and clothes out of a stinking river in Central America, as roosters shriek and families stare, is not on the job description I hand to prospective writing tutors. Maybe it should be.

Last month I accompanied three UWC tutors and ten other JMU students to the small town of Atenas, Costa Rica to help locals clean up rivers. Somehow we also ended up painting a water tower, picking up trash in a schoolyard, teaching English to some school children, pulling weeds, attending a rodeo, and touring a family coffee farm. Pura vida, as the locals say.

My trip leaders, Olivia Mankowski and Martin Steger, had to constantly revise plans, monitor the members of our group, negotiate with the local organization, consult with me, and keep everyone safe. This was not easy, but I was not worried. I've watched them become expert tutors over the last few years. They actually listen to other human beings and want to understand them. They diagnose problems and improvise solutions.



JMU students rest after a workday in Costa Rica. Photo by Jared Featherstone

They lead others to the point of discovery. They have an intellectual curiosity about everything. Great writing tutors have these traits.

I guess it shouldn't be a surprise that service learning comes naturally to writing tutors. Three out of the thirteen students I took to Costa Rica this spring break were writing tutors. Another UWC tutor, Evan McGrew,

was in Ecuador working with the indigenous Shuar people on sustainability. From the ASB trip to Belize I took last year, one student is now a writing tutor and another is in training. I

see a trend developing, and I like it.

This is starting to make sense. In the same way we can't predict what will happen during a writing center session, we can't predict how a service trip will unfold. Students are suddenly removed from their friends, apartments, families, routines, and technological comforts and placed into an unfamiliar place. Language barriers, cultural differences, and personality quirks ensure that no two trips or tutoring sessions are alike. Like our ASB travelers, new college writers may find themselves in a foreign world.

A new feature of this year's trip was that we stayed with Costa Rican families. Very few of us were even

The magic numbers

Wilson Hall consultations: 239
Carrier Library consultations: 30
East Campus Library: 13
Online consultations: 4
Total: 286
Workshops conducted: 4
Students and faculty attending: 34
Overall web site hits: 5,028
Resource downloads: 33
Students in Writing Fellows courses: 59



University Writing Center

Total # of writers helped in March: 412

close to fluent in Spanish, so we were in the humbling situation of being reduced to a child's vocabulary level. This gave many students a new appreciation for immigrants in the United States, and it gave writing tutors an appreciation for the international

students they work with in the UWC. Seeing this connection between tutoring and service work, the next step might actually be making it part of the writing tutor's job description. Harrisonburg is home to many recent U.S. immigrants who need to develop English writing skills

to succeed here. People in Central America also need writing skills to find careers that support their families and build local economies. We are ready to help.

*-Jared Featherstone,
UWC Coordinator*

A Writing Center Tutored



www.Longwood.edu

On Friday, February 25, I was one of five tutors from Longwood University who, along with our Writing Center director, visited JMU for a day-long trip and tour of JMU's writing centers. The first stop was the class that JMU students are required to take in order to apply to become a peer tutor (WRTC 345). It was interesting to see a classroom training format, as Longwood selects

tutors by application and interview. During the class, three tutors from the FYI center also facilitated a panel discussion; it was great to get their perceptions, input, insight, and tips on how to tutor more effectively. There were many inquiries from both JMU and Longwood students. It was great to learn about JMU's

writing centers in a classroom setting through a panel discussion.

A lot of our major questions were answered. The professor, Karen McDonnell, gave us a tour of JMU's Link Library, which is an awesome resource! We all wished that Longwood had something like that. I have since used it as a resource for myself as well as several students who have come into the Longwood Writing Center, with positive and enthusiastic feedback.

After the class, we had the opportunity to eat lunch with several other tutors at Madison Grill. It was excellent food and great conversation. Once lunch was over, we headed to the University Writing Center in Wilson Hall, and Jared Featherstone, the UWC director, pointed out the satellite locations in the libraries on the way. We sat in the weekly tutor development meeting and had more questions answered. It was great to both give and get input and feedback between the two centers.

*-Laura Beth Stricker, Senior/
Longwood University
Peer Tutor*

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Write Nights Expands



The UWC now offers late-night tutoring in ECL.

Photo by Evan McGrew

With the success of the University Writing Center's Write Nights at Carrier Library, the UWC now offers the same tutorial help at East Campus Library. With no appointment necessary, students can receive help on a first come, first

served basis every Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday evening from 7:00-10:00 p.m. As a tutor who works in both the Wilson Hall and ECL, I've learned that engaging students in their natural writing environment can provide a great learning experience.

Can We Build It?

Many would agree that writing essays is an important part of an English Literature or WRTC curriculum and is a skill that students perfect through practice. However, a problem arises when students across campus falsely believe that essay writing is a task undertaken only by English and Writing majors. I decided to look into this misconception and talk with three peer tutors with majors that aren't necessarily perceived as writing-intensive.

I began by asking the tutors what specifically about their major or minor strengthens their skills as a writing tutor. I was surprised by how precise their answers were. Senior Martin Steger replied that the SMAD major

gives him the opportunity to help students with specific types of writing (e.g. screenplay or TV writing). Senior Brittany Hinton offered a similar response; her Psychology major has helped her to navigate APA style and understand the APA manual (a skill most Literature majors struggle with).

"So what can we, as representatives of the UWC, do to change the misconception across campus?" I asked the tutors. They all agreed that feedback about the UWC travels by word of mouth, which lead to two conclusions. As Martin suggests, classroom visits can educate students on campus. Secondly, as Senior SCOM major Amy Sullivan recommends, the

The biggest difference I've noticed between the locations is that in the libraries, students come in the middle of their writing process. Chances are, the student was recently working on a draft; those concepts fresh on her mind, she can more easily articulate her concerns about a paper. When we meet students in their place of study, we are able to experience their writing process, and in return, we learn more about how students write papers.

As Write Nights continues to gain popularity, its value is becoming apparent. For students, it's another opportunity to revise and discuss their ideas. For tutors, it's a chance to engage students in their place of writing and learn about their habits. With stations at both Carrier and ECL, the UWC is becoming more accessible to students across all disciplines.

Evan McGrew, Junior/ Peer Tutor

UWC should aim to train new tutors for a wider knowledge base. We are certainly not experts but we are here to help on the writing portion. Variety in the center is ultimately more beneficial to the JMU community because of the specific skills that tutors may possess—citations styles, resume writing, business writing, interpersonal skills—which weave together to build a developed writing center.

Brittany extended some wise words for student writers: "when we make it to the working world, we're going to have to write something at some point. It doesn't matter what job we have."

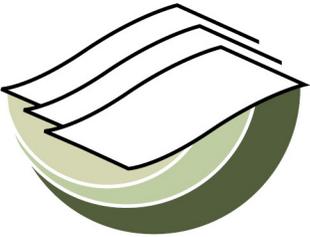
Camille Corum, Sophomore/ Peer Tutor

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



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