

UWC MONTHLY

A publication of the James Madison University Writing Center

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What's Up with the Writing Fellows?

The University Writing Center has been running its Writing Fellows Program for three years, and this semester, the program expanded even further with new tutors and new classes. Piloted in 2010 by Lead Peer Tutor Mike Kern, the Writing Fellows Program places an undergraduate tutor in a classroom for one semester. The courses can be from a range of disciplines, and Fellows are responsible for collaborating with both professors and students to act as a liaison between the two. As writing experts, they also help lead workshops and deliver mini-lessons to the class based on their writing needs.

This semester, Peer Tutor Anders Bruce served as a Writing Fellow for the JMUTeach Novel Writing

class. Having written novels of his own, Bruce brought experience and passion to the classroom as a mentor for the aspiring novelists. He worked with student instructor Zach Barnes and conducted workshops in the classroom that dealt with peer review/editing. "Zach has always looked at writing as a process, not just a product, so we've been able to collaborate very productively [to bring] Writing Center ideas and practices into the classroom," Bruce said. Hoping to become a professor himself, Bruce said that the Fellowship has been invaluable and has enriched his tutoring experience as well.

Peer Tutor Chris Deitrick also worked as a Fellow this semester

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Peer Tutor Anders Bruce tutors Christiana McGuigan

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UWC Monthly

Managing Editor: Maya Chandler

Design Editor: Kristin Gatti

Writers: Kristin Gatti, Nathan

Gallagher, Daniel Zimmerman, Rudy

Barrett, Allison Michelli

Editorial Advisor: Jared Featherstone

The Magic Numbers:

Nov/Dec

Wilson Hall sessions: 556

Carrier Library sessions: 83

Rose Library sessions: 74

APC sessions: 19

Total: 732

In-Class Presentation attendance: 214

Link Library visits: 392

Writing Fellows continued

for Social Work 320: Human Behavior in the Social Environment. As a psychology major with an understanding of mental processes and human behavior, he brought a unique perspective to the class. Students in the course had to write four papers related to case studies they had conducted, so Deitrick gave three thirty-minute lectures to guide them through specific writing they would be doing as professionals in the field, and how to apply that knowledge to their assignment. “I really enjoyed the chance to teach a class,” Deitrick said. “Even though I only gave three lectures, I still felt like I was the teacher, and I thought it was really cool to have that relationship with the students.”

The Writing Fellows Program provides a great opportunity for tutors to capitalize on their expertise within the classroom. Through the program, students gain authentic peer interactions, and instructors gain an enlightening pedagogical perspective. Because of a positive response and heightened interest in the program, it will continue to expand into even more courses and disciplines in years to come.

-Kristin Gatti, Peer Tutor

Shared Space

When students walk into the University Writing Center, they are immediately greeted by a tutor who asks them, “Hello! Are you here for the Writing Center or the Communication Center?” The centers are both located on the fourth floor of Wilson Hall, so it is important for the on-duty tutors to make sure everyone is directed to the right place. Students usually respond to the question with which center they have an appointment, and with whom. Occasionally, that question is answered with an, “Uh, I don’t know.” A few quick questions cure the confusion for the tutee, but there is something to be said about how close in nature the Writing and Communication Centers are.

Is there more to this confusion than some simple geography? Writing Center tutors’ goals are to help students as writers by becoming more aware of their work,

writing process, and writing habits. They are very tutee-focused. And the primary goal of the Communication Center tutors is very similar, says Communication Center Coordinator Paige Normand. They work with the student to help formulate and execute the speech, and both centers share a primary interest in student-focused sessions. Katie Lese, a senior Communication Center tutor, says, “We focus [...] on bettering the student as a speaker rather than bettering their speech. One way we do that is [by] learning and practicing non-directive learning....” Non-evaluative and non-directive tutoring styles are a large part of both centers. As proof, Lese’s statement mirrors what seasoned Writing Center tutor Adrian Jarvis says: “We don’t write anything for the tutees. We try to help the students clarify and articulate ideas that are already there or that need to be there.”

While the centers share a floor in Wilson and some stylistic choices, there are elements that the Communication Center has to consider that just don’t factor into the Writing Center’s goals. “You can’t tell someone that what they are doing isn’t working. It will shatter their confidence. You have to look out for the performance aspect of it as well,” says Normand. Both centers deal with the egos of the creators but the confidence of the speech-maker is evaluated during the in-class presentation, while the confidence of the writer can only be inferred by the teacher when he or she is reading the student’s work. Meanwhile, Writing Center tutors have to be more flexible with the range of assignments they can work with because students can bring in anything from lab reports to personal statements. As for the Communication Center, Normand says that “seventy-five percent of the speeches we see are from [the General Education Communications class].”

Overall though, it seems fitting that these two Learning Centers share a physical space due to the similarities in their nature. Even though they deviate from each other in what services they provide, it’s nice to have company that has a similar philosophy.

-Nathan Gallagher, Peer Tutor

Applying Tutoring Techniques in the Classroom: Olivia Mankowski

The difference between tutoring and teaching is often minimal, the overlap in pedagogy substantial and the motivation behind the two crafts nearly identical—so says UWC alumna Olivia Mankowski. After graduating from JMU with an education degree in the social sciences, Mankowski landed a job teaching 7th grade Civics and Economics at Rodney Thompson Middle School in Stafford County, Virginia. She believes that her time working with the UWC opened professional doors for her while she was at JMU, whether it be presenting at conferences for faculty, becoming a Writing Fellow, or contributing to a published article on writing center pedagogy. Now she attempts to incorporate the techniques she learned at the UWC into her classroom pedagogy.



UWC alum Olivia Mankowski (center front) volunteered with some UWC buddies in Belize.

Among her lessons on the structure of government and supply and demand, Mankowski includes two extracurricular activities for her students: National History Day and We the People. Because both of the programs are competitive in nature, entrance into these activities is merit-based, and students must compose essays in order to participate. Since students compete for limited spots, this affords Mankowski the opportunity to tutor them on their writing. She says, “I have even had sessions very similar to

writing center sessions with these students,” meaning that the conversation advanced to a discussion of the paper’s organization, structure, and logic—an impressive jump, given that the students are only in the 7th grade.

Another lasting benefit of her time spent as a writing tutor is that Mankowski continues to use guiding questions in her lessons, Socratically drawing answers out of her students rather than feeding them facts. Of course, like any teacher, she faces frustrating situations with students who are obstinate or who struggle to learn, but she says that her training helps her to “guide” the student rather than “fix” the situation. Mankowski also thinks that this approach is particularly helpful during group discussions when the lesson seems to have stalled or the students have hit a roadblock. This model is more of a student-centered pedagogy, as opposed to a teacher- or classroom-centered pedagogy, and often it is more effective in the long-term progress of the students.

In addition to the time she spent actually working in the Writing Center, Mankowski remembers that “often times I would be at the [UWC] even when I was not working” because of her friendships with the other tutors. She was able to travel to Belize and Costa Rica with members of the UWC on aid projects; she is especially fond of her memories of Costa Rica because the group stayed with local families, which Mankowski believes helped broaden her cultural understanding and helped polish her Spanish-speaking skills. Also, Mankowski and another UWC alum, Martin Steger, planned projects and jobs for the rest of the team. Though Mankowski credits these experiences as formative for her as a person and as a teacher, she is ready to settle into a profession that she intends to keep for many years.

-Daniel Zimmerman, Graduate Assistant

Beyond the Session: UWC Professional Development Programs Allow Tutors To Stay Sharp and Make an Impact

The staff of the Writing Center keeps their tutoring skills honed outside of the tutoring sessions by breaking off into professional development groups to read and discuss writing center theory and practice. However, these groups do much more than just talk the talk; they work on a variety of projects to enhance the Writing Center experience. Many of the myriad resources on the Writing Center's webpage have been born in these professional development groups, from systems to assess the Writing Center's effectiveness, to student guides for writing and argumentation, to promotional videos that get the word out about the UWC.

These professional development groups are constantly brainstorming innovative ways to make the Writing Center more accessible and efficient. In the past, the UWC's professional development groups compiled a set of resources for first-year writers for the UWC's Link Library. They even gave a new home to many of the resources from the recently-shuttered FYI writing center formerly. Another group produced an informational "how-to" guide video that tutees can watch after booking an appointment. It illustrates how to get to the Wilson Hall location, as well as what to expect from a tutoring session. One group built a PowerPoint presentation entitled "What *Law & Order* Taught me about Writing Papers" that uses a humorous pop-culture metaphor to help students understand the writing process.

Some of the professional development projects have affected a wider audience than just JMU students. For instance, in 2012, one group whose focus was on tutoring English Language Learners published an article in the International TESOL Association's *Second Language Writing Newsletter*, bringing more public attention to the work of the JMU Writing Center.

This semester the professional development groups are hard at work to bring other improvements to the UWC. There is now a dedicated professional development group

in charge of the writing and design of *The UWC Monthly*, in contrast with the original model of getting articles on a volunteer basis. Another group, led by peer education coordinator Laura Schubert, is creating a manual for current tutors to learn how to integrate resources like the Smart Board, televisions, iPads, and the book collection available in the Wilson Hall location into their sessions. Emiline Buhler, a graduate tutor, is continuing to work with many of the Psychology-major tutors on assessment to evaluate and chart the effect of writing tutors on a student's writing development. Recently, they have submitted a proposal about Writing Center assessment practices to the Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association Conference.

These projects and many more are on the horizon as the professional development programs continue to foster involvement and innovation in the Writing Center.

-Rudy Barrett, Peer Tutor

Graduate Student Spotlight: Daniel Zimmerman

Daniel Zimmerman, one of the newest members of the JMU Writing Center team, is hitting it out of the park as an all-star graduate tutor. Zimmerman earned his B.A. in English with a secondary education licensure at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee. While at Bryan College, he played baseball and was also a peer tutor at their Writing Center. He tutored for two and a half years at Bryan, beginning in the spring semester of his junior year and working throughout his senior year. After graduation, he continued to tutor at the center while he was teaching 7th and 8th grade English at a local middle school. Zimmerman stated that his favorite part of tutoring was that he "appreciated the authenticity and sincerity of tutoring someone one-on-one, helping them to clarify their ideas, structure them logically, and express them eloquently."

After spending three years teaching middle school and high school English in Dayton, Tennessee, Zimmerman decided to come back to college for a M.A. in English at JMU. His time spent as an educator prepared him for graduate school and tutoring at the JMU Writing Center. Zimmerman stated, "It's often difficult to treat every student like an individual when you have 140 students; however, trying to develop each student's linguistic and literary skills, no matter how simple or complex, taught me to meet people where they are at and to be compassionate enough to help them take the next step in their learning." He continued, "That is essentially what the tutoring process is; as a high school teacher, I experienced



Daniel with his wife, Kara

that full-time with the added strain of maintaining classroom discipline and wading through bureaucratic paperwork."

Here at JMU, Zimmerman's M.A. program consists of seminars on a variety of literature-related topics such as Renaissance Literature and Critical Theory. Currently he serves as a graduate assistant at the University Writing Center. Here, Zimmerman is able to create an outlet for himself to combine his love of teaching with the art of tutoring and "to help people learn and grow in a very intimate and personal setting, as opposed to a large classroom."

-Allison Michelli, Peer Tutor

University Writing Center

www.jmu.edu/uwc

The University Writing Center offers:

- Free individualized writing help for all students and faculty
- In-class workshops on a variety of writing topics
- Hundreds of writing links collected on the UWC website

Locations and Hours

- Wilson Hall: Mon-Thurs 9-5, Fri 9-noon
- Carrier Library: Mon-Wed, 7-10 p.m.
- Rose Library: Mon-Wed, 7-10 p.m.
- Athletic Performance Center: Mon/Wed 6:30-9:30 p.m.



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