

# UWC Monthly

A publication of the James Madison University Writing Center

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## What Isn't New?



Olivia Mankowski explores the Smartboard technology. Photo by Evan McGrew

The University Writing Center has made quite a few changes this semester. More tutors are now available in Wilson Hall to take walk-ins as well as scheduled appointments. There are also technology upgrades, such as Smartboards and eight new iPads that writers can use during or after consultations.

For visual learners, the technology could potentially mean new ways of approaching the writing process.

Camille Corum, a peer tutor, is discovering the most effective ways to implement these new technologies. She is optimistic about the potential of these additions and envisions some great improvements coming from them. She anticipates that

the new gadgets will “get the tutors and the students conversing in a different way...able to see writing and revision in a different context that is much more direct, interactive, and visible.”

Peer tutor Evan McGrew believes that “as students find out what technologies work for them, they will hopefully feel more compelled to seek out our services.” This expansion will be a learning process for both the students and the tutors, but everyone is off to a positive start exploring all of the possibilities.

But the innovation isn't contained to the center: UWC tutors now want to go mobile. They are developing an iPhone/iPad app to aid both tutors and students with writing resources. So far, the plan is for it to include a condensed and more interactive version of the UWC website's Link Library. Caroline Prendergast, a tutor working on the app, says, “By making these writing tools accessible in a highly modern format, students and writers in general might get a little more excited about the work that we do and, in turn, the work they themselves are capable of producing.” The group plans to get student input to make this app as helpful and useable as possible.

In order to get the word out about these innovations and changes, a non-tutoring internship has been created at the UWC. The center coordinator, Jared Featherstone, explains that it “serves the need for internships for those not wanting to tutor. When they apply, they propose what they will do at the center that will benefit their major and career as

## The magic numbers

Wilson Hall: 266  
Carrier Library: 53  
East Campus Library: 46  
Online consultations: 4  
Workshops conducted: 37  
Students and faculty attending: 1,204  
Overall web site hits: 7,308  
Resource downloads: 66  
Students in Writing Fellows courses: 54  
Total # of writers helped in Sept.: 1693



University Writing Center

The University Writing Center  
Wilson Hall/Carrier Library/East Campus Library  
[www.jmu.edu/uwc](http://www.jmu.edu/uwc)

well as the center.” Intern Faizah Butt, a double major in Communication Studies and Writing, Rhetoric & Technical Communication, has developed a new marketing campaign for the UWC. She uses the center’s Facebook page, Twitter account, and flyers in coordination with existing programs and special events to make more JMU students and faculty aware of the UWC’s services and resources.

Whether it is because of the increase in staff, the new technology, or the efforts of the new interns, the word is getting out about the UWC. Student traffic has significantly increased.

“We are busier now than we have

ever been for this time of year,” Featherstone says, “and we will only become busier as the semester progresses.”

Looking beyond this semester, there are more changes on the horizon, including a new location. Kurt Schick, director of the JMU Learning Centers, states that the Writing Center, along with the Communication Center, ELL Services, and the Science & Math Center, will all be relocated together at the previous site of Rockingham Memorial Hospital, which “will essentially be the center of campus.” He hopes that it will be finished by the fall of 2014.

Even though some of the changes

are more immediate than others, students seeking help with their writing have all the more reason to breathe a sigh of relief. The UWC will continue to improve throughout the semester and the coming years, and the success is already apparent.

Two writing centers from other universities have used the center at JMU as a model for their own development. As recognition and feedback come in from the university and the writing center community at large, the UWC will continue to adapt to better meet the needs of JMU students and faculty.

~Alexa Livezey, Junior/Peer Tutor

## Tutoring Library-Style

One of my professional goals is to never get too comfortable. This might be the mark of a trailblazer or simple insanity. But, it does explain why a Carrier Librarian is spending a year of her professional life in the University Writing Center.

I got curious about what writing centers and tutors do when Write Nights began in Carrier. As tutors and students worked together in our library spaces, I watched curiously. What are they talking about and doing? I remain curious about how a librarian might inform tutoring and wonder what I can learn from tutors and the scholarship of writing

centers: What do students really do with all these sources when they use them to create their papers? How can writing centers and libraries partner to effectively teach students how to use their writing and research to learn? What does that kind of a partnership look like?

With this appointment as a Faculty Fellow, I begin to answer these questions. Already I’ve seen connections between what librarians and tutors do. Both are in the helping business, but it is a form of helping that enables learning and is specifically not “fixing.” By sitting in on WRTC 345 (Tutoring Writing),

I am becoming familiar with the scholarship of tutoring and writing center practice. This unique class is a mix of potential undergraduate student tutors, graduate students, and faculty that fosters a community of collegial learning unlike any other academic experience I’ve had. I have as much to learn as the undergraduates in the course, and I am excited about this professional experiment. But, in all likelihood, this crop of tutors will also know a lot about libraries and research before it is all over.

~Kathy Clarke, UWC Faculty Fellow

## A Peer No More

After two years of tutoring in university writing centers as a graduate student, I thought the transition to being the instructor of a college writing class would be all but seamless. I had studied and been trained to teach college writing, but I wondered how useful discussions of pedagogies and class

organization would actually be. I planned to just connect with each student individually and then alternate between coach and cheerleader for their writing, just like I did in the Writing Center.

Of course, this delusion quickly fell apart in the classroom. Course instructors are decidedly not peers.

They give grades and owe their students more direction than a

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statement like, “Maybe you can try it like this.” But I retained the hope that I could still use my tutor persona in one-on-one conferences with my students about their papers. Yet as student after student came in, sat across from me in my office, and discussed their papers against the rubric, I could not be anything other than their instructor. I was stuck behind the classroom roles, behind the rubric, behind my desk!

There are many lessons from my time as a writing tutor that do help me

a great deal as a course instructor. I was exposed to a large body of writing from disciplines other than my own, which, as a course instructor, enables me to give students the freedom to choose writing topics according to their own academic interests. I also learned what makes for confusing assignment prompts, what students stress over the most in papers, and what type of assignments seem to be most effective.

But the biggest lesson I learned is that Writing Center tutors fulfill a

unique role that helps students in a way that instructors simply cannot. So even though my door is always open to my students for questions or problems, I still encourage them to utilize the Writing Center during their academic career for a fresh perspective, to be coached on a level playing field, and to experience the community of learning that JMU offers through its friendly and effective University Writing Center.

~Michael Critzer, Graduate Assistant

## It's Not Always Academic

What could possibly be more frightening than a 15-page paper on Economic Game Theory? What could be more difficult to formulate than a critical analysis of Oliver Cromwell's regime? The answer is closer than you think—try writing about yourself!

Whether addressed to a review board, university, or future employer, writing about yourself can send any individual into a frenzy of typing and backspacing. The difficulty is in the endless amount of possible details that need to be found in the mind and pushed onto paper in an orderly, clear manner.

For instance, crafting a cover letter can be a struggle. After researching the business, soul-searching for personal skills and booting up a word processing program, it is tempting to produce a document that reads: “I am a hard worker. I am interested in your company. One time I worked hard and I learned a lesson from the experience.” How can a writer possibly sound both genuine and appealing when writing any sort of personal statement?

First, put the pen down and move your hands away from the keyboard. Take a moment to think about the specific purpose of the paper, and then

try to imagine an angle to approach the topic. This can be a story, a set of characteristics, an important moment in life, or anything else that is both truthful and addresses the audience. After developing a rough plan, brainstorm personal details to back up the claims that you make. This is the key to sounding both interesting and personable—having details that support what you say and paint a clearer picture of yourself. Once you're ready, invite someone to read over the paper to check that the writing is both clear and engaging.

Here's where writing tutors come into play. Balancing all these suggestions and requirements in your writing makes composing that final draft a challenge. Why waste an hour in confusion when a UWC tutor can

easily show you a sample statement? Why only wonder if your personal details are interesting and relatable, when you can ask a tutor for feedback? As Paige Normand of the University Writing Center explains, “We can help writers gain a perspective on themselves that would be hard to gain working alone.” Tutors can help writers find that happy balance among prompt requirements, vivid details, and staying true to themselves.

Finishing a personal statement can be a rewarding experience, especially if writers approach the task with poise and clarity. So take your time, collect your thoughts, write what is important to you, and don't forget the UWC when you need a helping hand.

~Kara Myren, Junior/ Peer Tutor



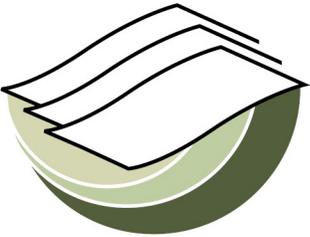
Caitlin Lee reviews Brittany Morgan's cover letter. Photo by Evan McGrew

## University Writing Center

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