

# UWC Fall 2016 Email Archive

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## Fall 2016 Email Archive

Monday, December 5, 2016 3:38 PM: Dear UWC

Thank you for your great work this semester. I'm sorry I was unable to attend the UWC holiday party and semester wrap-up. I had a family emergency, but things are getting better. I received your notes about scheduling issues, and I will make revisions to the schedule this week. Once I've done that, I'll send out a revised Spring 2017 schedule.

Looking over the comments from our clients, I'm seeing praise for Maya, Annie, Emmie, Jackie, Jemma, Jessie, Jordan, Lydia, Olivia, Taylor, Vanessa, and Kevin. In other comments, tutors were not named, so I'm sure more of you were recognized. Please (everyone) continue to conduct thoughtful and professional sessions through these last stressful weeks of the semester. I know that many of you are probably as burned out as our clients, but we need to maintain our standards of quality.

In the client comments, I'm also seeing some misunderstanding about the UWC's mission. Some of these are likely from the HUM 252 onslaught we saw last week (I mentioned this in a previous email). Please be clear about the UWC's mission and philosophy, especially with first-time visitors and those required to visit. Also, please let me know if you encounter clients who are required to come or getting extra credit for coming. I like to keep track of this, and, in some cases, I will contact the faculty member (not to report on individual students but problematic trends). I contacted the HUM 252 professor and explained what was happening. He addressed the issue in class with his students, and we are going to meet before next semester to strategize about how his students can prepare for more productive sessions.

### Finals Week

Looking ahead to next week, several peer tutors sent me late requests to alter their hours during finals week. During our opening meeting of the semester, I asked for this information by 11/18. This deadline was also given long ago on a printout, a poster in the UWC, an email, and on the UWC website's Tutor Resources. At this point, we will only cancel hours that directly overlap with an exam.

### Post-election issues

I wanted to let you know that the International Writing Centers Association President has issued a statement in the wake of the election, and the UWC affirms this statement.

"Amidst current political acrimony in the US and across the globe, the International Writing Centers Association reaffirms its long commitment to civil discourse, inclusive language, and collaborative practice. Writing centers

are inherently multicultural and multilingual sites that welcome and accommodate diversity. Writing centers inclusively serve all students, including members of underrepresented groups such as people of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and people with a range of abilities, economic needs, and linguistic expression. The International Writing Centers Association values diversity among its membership and seeks to serve a diverse membership responsibly and well (IWCA Diversity Initiative, approved November 20, 2006). As such, the writing center community continues to uphold the ideals of democratic education and social justice."

Shareen Grogan  
President, International Writing Centers Association

### **Reminders and Announcements**

\*If you were not at Friday's meeting, you need to confirm the spring hours I've scheduled for you. Please stop by my office.

\*Our last day open for this semester is Thursday, 12/15.

\*The Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY) is seeking strong applicants for teaching assistant positions in its summer writing workshops for pre-collegiate students. Information about other positions, including instructional roles, is available [online](#).

\*The deadline to express interest in next semester's Linguistic Diversity seminar is 12/9. This is a great opportunity for UWC consultants! In case you missed the email, here's the info:

### ***English Language Learner Services presents***

### **Spring 2017: Peer Educators' Seminar: Working with Linguistic Diversity**

#### **Gain Comfort, Confidence, and Capability:**

1.
  1. **Increase communication skills** to benefit culturally and linguistically diverse students
  2. **Gain confidence** working with linguistically diverse populations
  3. **Develop** tutoring facility
  4. **Network** across disciplines with other Learning Centers student employees

#### **Details:**

1.
  1. Meetings are **Fridays** at **12:15pm - 1:15pm** during the first 8-week block from **January 13th to March 3rd**.
  2. Meetings in SSC (room to be determined)
  3. Open to all Learning Center student employees
  4. [Express Interest](#) by **December 9th**

#### **Questions?**

Email English Language Learner Services Coordinator Kristen Shrewsbury at [shrewskm@jmu.edu](mailto:shrewskm@jmu.edu) or stop by SSC 1152

#### **Testimonials** from the 2016 Cohort:

"I've really enjoyed this experience. I feel more confident and comfortable working with English language learners, and it has been fun to learn in this group setting!"

"Great seminar! I cannot wait to pull out these notes when I work with English language learners!"

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Monday, November 14, 2016 4:20 PM: Friday recap and final semester meeting plans

Colleagues, thanks for a great meeting Friday. I appreciate your participation and thoughtfulness as we talked about distressed students and tutoring techniques. I just wanted to review some important pieces of information.

- *Spring 2017 schedule.* Joan has processed your rehire paperwork, including the reductions some of you had to make to your hours. The next step is to fill out your availability in the Spring 2017 Doodle. I know I say this every semester, but I will reiterate that I need you to indicate all hours of availability that aren't classes, class-related events scheduled in advance, or religious obligations. We have a wide range of hours and days to cover, so I can't schedule according to your personal preferences.
  - As soon as possible, go to this [link](#) and click on all of your available hours. You will only be scheduled for the number of hours you requested, but the times/days will be set according to the UWC's needs.
  - If your schedule changes later and you absolutely must make a change, please update your entries on the Doodle poll and email me right away.
  
- *Distressed students.* Please be sensitive to distressed students. Validate the feelings they express, whether you think those feelings are justified or not. Avoid any dismissive language. Tactfully refer students to other relevant services. This [page](#) has a list of available resources at JMU. You can also just search "campus resources" in the search box on [jmu.edu](#).
  
- *Final all-staff meeting.* Our last all-staff meeting is on 12/2/16. We'll check in with each pro dev group about the progress you've made on your tutoring simulations. We'll look at our semester stats and get your input on the University Writing Center Strategic Plan (our plan for the next five years). But I thought we could do this in the context of a staff holiday party! Please fill out this Google [form](#) with a snack, dish, or non-alcoholic beverage you'd like to bring.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Monday, October 31, 2016 3:59 PM: Dear UWC

Dear UWC,

With 626 appointments, this has been one of our busiest Octobers on record. More importantly, 98% of clients surveyed report that they felt more equipped to write after their sessions. I know that many of you are just as overwhelmed by classes and commitments as our clients, so I appreciate your continued dedication and professionalism in the UWC.

We've had numerous comments from happy clients, and I've sent some of these to you individually. Let's also take a look at two comments that showed dissatisfaction.

Two common reasons for clients feeling dissatisfied with the UWC are the clashing of expectations and lack of communication. From our client surveys this month, we can see both of these reasons in action. Here's a communication issue.

"After my session I didn't feel confident about my paper. I was told that I would have to rewrite my paper after I had just rewritten it prior to coming. I didn't understand how or why I needed to start over or what was wrong. I felt less confident after my appointment. I felt if it was suggested I start over there should have been an explanation and further instruction that would lead me in the right direction when I left my appointment."

I'm always hesitant to draw conclusions about a session I didn't see or to take a client's word as a completely accurate description of the session, but we should be checking in with clients to make sure they understand how to move forward with their writing after the session. This is one aspect of the "eye toward future application" principle that we discussed at our last all-staff meeting. We should make sure clients are very clear about how to use the feedback we have given. I often write, or have them write, a to-do list. If the tutor had checked in with this client, the client's dissatisfaction may have been avoided. Now, here's an example of an expectations issue:

"It would have been nice to have a full hour with the tutor, and not have a strict start time. My classes ended at 12:05 in HBS, I made my appointment in time, but I was fearful I wouldn't be able to. We only got through about half of my 3 1/2 page paper, I wish I could have extended the time to get to the rest of it."

In the above comment, I can see that the client had the expectation of getting through the entire paper. For many clients, a session is successful if we "get through" the paper. We know that this is not the best measure of a session, but we need to make our philosophy clear to the client. The above session may have been very successful by our standards, but, because those standards were not communicated (likely), we have a dissatisfied client.

Tutoring Craft

It's always important to take note of where we are in the semester when you are working with a client. Sessions that

happen in week two of the semester might require a different approach than sessions occurring at week ten (this week). I'd like to point out two considerations that might help you in your sessions.

1. Professor feedback. At this point in the semester, students are likely to have gotten some form of feedback on their writing from their professors. Even if that feedback is not addressing the current paper, it could be useful. Seeing (or hearing about) that feedback can give you some direction for the session, particularly when the writer isn't sure what to focus on in revision. The feedback from professors can give you a sense of what they value in writing, what they want from the assignment, and what they are likely to criticize.
2. Previous sessions at the UWC. At this point in the semester, about half of our clients have been to the UWC before. You can build upon their previous experience. In addition to reading the session reports of prior sessions, you can also simply ask the client about feedback or techniques that have helped in the past: "I see you've had sessions with a few of our consultants. What's been particularly helpful to you?"
3. Stressed Out. At this point in the semester, clients are likely to be under stress. Major assignments are due. Mid-term papers are due. People are trying to catch up with work after being sick. Consider what you can do to help overwhelmed students break their writing tasks into smaller, more manageable portions.
  - a. Allow students to vent about their stress if they need to. Avoid saying, "There's nothing to worry about. You'll be fine." This does not validate their feelings about being stressed. Instead, you might simply validate their feelings: "I see that this project is really stressful for you." That way, a student will know you are listening and not dismissing.
  - b. When a student really seems to be having a rough time, you might remind them that the counseling center is upstairs and that it's perfectly normal to go there for help.

#### Reminders

\*It's time to interview your new potential colleagues, the tutoring writing students. They have turned in their applications, and we'll likely start interviews later this week. If you are not busy on a shift, I might ask you to help out with interviews. If you are interested in being on some interview committees, I would really appreciate your participation. Contact me if you would like to help outside of your regular tutoring hours.

\*Remember these important dates!

11.10.16 deadline for current tutors to submit rehire paperwork (contact Joan Fahrney in advance of this date) If you plan to continue working in the spring, you need to do this!

11.11.16 all-staff meeting 2:30-4:30 (topic: cultural implications of WC work; "standard" English, written accent, pronouns and LGBTQIQA)

11.16.16 deadline to submit Spring 2017 schedule availability through this [Doodle Poll](#)

11.18.16 deadline to reduce or cancel your hours during Finals Week (fill out Google form)

Thanks again for your great work in the UWC! Happy Halloween!

---Jared

Monday, October 17, 2016 4:29 PM: Recap from Friday's Meeting

#### Meeting Recap

**Tutoring Practice.** Remember to look for a demonstration of learning during your tutoring sessions and to offer advice with an eye toward future application. We are trying to facilitate the transfer of strategies and insights from these sessions to the client's future writing tasks. Ask yourself this question: Am I advising this client in a way that enables him or her to apply this knowledge in the future?

**Grammar!** If you got below a 90 on the grammar diagnostic or you spent a lot of time trying to figure out the answers, you'll want to research the grammar, punctuation, and style issues that you had difficulty with. In the test results, the writing issue for each incorrect answer is identified below that question ("for more practice..."). After you have looked up those grammar/punctuation issues and feel comfortable with them, please take the [second grammar](#)

[diagnostic](#) (and send the results to me and to yourself). It is my expectation that you will offer grammar and punctuation advice with certainty. You can, of course, use sites and handbooks during sessions, but you should also build your own knowledgebase about how to identify and explain common issues like the ones featured in the diagnostic. If you have any confusion about these issues, please ask another tutor or UWC faculty member.

**Walk-ins.** With no designated walk-in tutors, we have increased the number of appointments students can make in a single day and in a single week. Be attentive to the way repeat clients are approaching these sessions. Repeat clients should be returning for productive reasons, such as long or complex papers, different papers, confusion about a paper they already brought in and tried to revise, examining a significant revision to a paper they already worked on with a tutor, etc.

#### **Reminders.**

\*Writing opportunities! If you want to write a story for the UWC website, please contact Maya.

\*Campus kitchen volunteer opportunity. A group of dedicated students are working to launch a chapter of Campus Kitchen at JMU. These clubs exist to provide students with the opportunity to divert food from going to waste from the dining halls and connect it with people in need within the community. There are over 54 schools, including Virginia Tech, UVA, and George Mason that already have chapters of Campus Kitchen at their school. We think JMU should be the next to have a Campus Kitchen! Here's an informative [video](#).

\*11/10 deadline to submit rehire paperwork for the UWC. Contact Joan Fahrney!

\*Please fill out "Actual Session Length" on your client report forms. Notice the pull-down menu at the top of the client report form. We need this data. Thank you.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Wednesday, October 12, 2016 4:45 PM: Friday's Meeting

Folks, remember that we have mandatory all-staff meeting this Friday, 2:30-4:30 in the UWC. To be prepared for the meeting, please do the following:

1. Complete the grammar diagnostic and send me your results by midnight tonight (see my previous email)
2. Sign up for the free version of Grammarly or Ginger (grammar check software), whichever appeals to you
3. Bring a laptop or tablet to the meeting (if possible).

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Monday, October 10, 2016 12:12 PM: Preparation for Friday's Meeting

Colleagues, as you know, we have an all-staff meeting this Friday. Our topic is grammar and punctuation. Get pumped! We are going to delve into those LOC issues that have been plaguing you your whole life. We are also going to look into the resources you might use during and between sessions to help clients and to build your grammar/punctuation expertise.

In preparation for this meeting, I would like you to take an online grammar diagnostic test. At the end of the test, you will send your results to yourself and to me (by entering my email address). The test is 50 questions. Please allow yourself 20-30 minutes to take it, and do not consult any resources.

This test is based on the most common errors made by student writers, particularly those that affect meaning. This is not esoteric material. These are issues we face daily in the UWC.

The purpose is not to out the grammar slackers but to increase the level of grammar/punctuation expertise in the UWC. In order to do that, we need a sense of your baseline grammar knowledge. This will help me determine our focus for professional development. You will not be banished from the UWC if your score is less than impressive.

The motivation for working on grammar is that our clients want us to have this knowledge. In the fall of 2015, we surveyed 395 UWC clients. In that survey, we asked the following question:

"How important is it for tutors to have expertise in the following areas?"

Grammar and punctuation was at the top of the list. I know this may indicate some misunderstanding about the UWC's purpose and our mission, but we also need to meet the needs of our clients.

Please complete [Grammar Diagnostic I](#) by midnight Wednesday (I need time to review them before Friday). Have fun!

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Monday, October 3, 2016 10:58 AM: Short UWC Survey

Undergraduate and graduate tutors, I need you to complete the following survey by the end of the day Wednesday. It should only take 5 minutes or so. Please be honest. This information will help us plan future events for the UWC. Thanks!

[http://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_5nEbKjHPKj4kikh](http://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5nEbKjHPKj4kikh)

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Tuesday, September 27, 2016 4:27 PM: HIST 225 Students

Colleagues, I'm noticing that we are under invasion by HIST 225 students who are getting extra credit for coming to the UWC. This is fine, but I want to make sure you know how to manage these sessions. I've spoken to several tutors about their experiences in these sessions, and it seems that most of these sessions are going very well.

In some cases, however, the students seem to be going through the motions in order to get the credit. Some students were resistant to anything other than surface changes to their papers. As you probably know, we do provide small green slips (located in the file folders at the front desk) that confirm a client's visit to the UWC.

A few notes about this extra-credit situation.

1. I've contacted the professor to let her know that some students are not particularly engaged in their sessions.
2. You are welcome to refuse to give a student a green confirmation slip. If clients stay for a very short session and are clearly checked out or uninvested, please do not give them a slip. Feel free to blame this on me: "The UWC director said that we can't give proof of visit forms unless the client is fully engaged in the session."
3. Avoid sitting there with a resistant client as you silently suffer inside. I find it very helpful to just state what I'm observing in terms of the client's behavior: "Hey, I'm noticing that you don't seem to be interested in talking in depth about your ideas or making substantive changes to your paper. I'm also noticing that you aren't taking notes or making edits to your draft. Why is that? Are you not finding this session useful?"
4. A client does not have to stay for the full 45 minutes to get a green slip, but you should have seen active involvement and a demonstration of learning before providing one. This doesn't mean the session must focus on higher order concerns. You can have a substantive session that focuses primarily on later order concerns.
5. It's best to establish expectations early in the session. If you see that's it's HIST 225 (Professor Harding), you might ask if they are hoping to get a permission form. You might also tell them up front that, because of your meanie boss, you can only provide the form if students are actively engaged in the session.
6. If a student is very resistant or checked out, please note this in your session report form.
7. If you have any other questions for how to respond in these sessions, please let me know.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Friday, September 16, 2016 4:08 PM: Happy Friday

Colleagues, we're off to an impressive start this semester. We've now been open for two weeks, and we've conducted 200 appointments. This is at least 40 more appointments than we had last fall during the same timeframe. More importantly, our client surveys are overwhelmingly positive. In fact, we haven't had one negative comment so far.

Please continue to facilitate thoughtful, professional sessions with your clients. Referring back to the UWC Tutor Field guide should help you, but also feel free to seek help from colleagues on your shift or UWC faculty lurking in their offices. New tutors, it's important to remember that you are not being tested during a session. You can always ask a clarifying question, scrap a technique and try another, consult an online resource or handbook, or ask a colleague. The goal is to meet a client's needs in a way that is consistent with the UWC's mission.

I've been pleased to see less tutor clumping around the power table and more conversation with incoming clients. It's very important to us that clients and visitors feel welcome when they arrive at the UWC. I've also been pleased to see and hear about exemplary sessions given to the Tutoring Writing students.

At least a few of you asked policy or practice questions, so I'll repeat my responses here for everyone's information. There's been some confusion about how many appointments we allow per day and per week. We allow one per day and three per week. We increased the weekly amount from two to three because we no longer have designated walk-in tutors. Some students, like multilingual writers, relied upon walk-in tutors to get the extra help they need, so this change was made, in part, to accommodate their needs.

Some of you have also asked about students arriving at the center looking for their professor. We have two professors holding office hours or conferences in the UWC. The professors should be in room 1122, which is the room next to the kitchen across from the long conference table in the UWC. I will speak to the professors about making sure students know when office hours are actually held.

Lastly, please let me know if a client makes you uncomfortable for any reason. Even if you don't feel particularly threatened, I keep track of these clients, and I can help you respond effectively to them. Also, I can follow up with other JMU offices, like the Counseling Center, the Behavioral Assessment Team, and the Office of Disability Services to gather more information if necessary. New tutors, please don't be alarmed. This situation is quite rare, but we did have a client make a few tutors uncomfortable this semester. In this case, the client was one I was already aware of from previous years. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please let me know.

Earlier this week, I sent out some reminders about volunteer opportunities with local high school and community college students. We could still use some help for both events.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

September 12, 2016 6:00 PM: APA Style questions?

Hello tutors!

I hope your first few weeks in the UWC (or back in the UWC) have been great. Word on the street is that we've been getting a lot of APA style questions. Yay! It is totally awesome that we have folks from non-humanities disciplines coming to us for help. For those of you who are unfamiliar with APA, no one expects you to have the manual memorized, but you should be able to show students where and how to get their questions answered. You should also be able to talk to students about why there are different citation styles for different disciplines, and generally what kind of information the APA manual covers (more than just citation and reference list stuff). Please take a few minutes to watch this video I created about navigating APA style resources (and how to get those tricky APA questions answered): <https://youtu.be/dJ6uGrymd2g>. Also know that you're always welcome to come to me with any questions you have trouble answering!

Best,

Lucy (your APA style guru)

Monday, September 12, 2016 10:17 AM: Volunteers Needed

Colleagues, we still need volunteers if these two events are going to happen. Please let me know right away if you are interested in volunteering to help Blue Ridge Community College students or Stuart's Draft High School students. More info below.

1. The University Writing Center invites you to consider volunteering as a writing tutor for Blue Ridge Community College students, as part of your professional development hours. Consultations will take place both at The Cave (BRCC's Academic Support Center) and at the Student Success Center. Transportation is available from Godwin Hall to BRCC, and back, and free of charge. You should expect to work with ESL writers, and students taking Literature, and Advanced Composition classes. You should also expect to work with students who will transfer to JMU, and this gives you an opportunity to model for them our academic values, and to show them our spaces on campus. Working on BRCC premises entails a longer time commitment beyond an hour of tutoring given traveling time. Whether you work at The Cave or at Success, you will have to enter the writer's data from a scheduling system created just for BRCC students (from drop-down menu), just as you do when you work with walk-ins.

Please contact Dr. Vanessa Rouillon (rouillvi@jmu.edu) and let her know of your interest in this volunteer opportunity. You will have to fill out a volunteer and background check form, which she'll be happy to send to you. Thank you for considering this volunteer work.

2. Help High School students from Stuarts Draft High School. We need volunteers if we are going to agree to this (We can't have students arrive and find no tutors). We'll help small groups of 2-3 students prepare and/or revise their research papers. This would take place on Friday, 9/30 between 12:30 and 2:15. Contact Jared.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Thursday, September 8, 2016 10:40 AM: when you're on shift...

Colleagues, we're off to a great start in the UWC, but I have a few requests.

1. During your shifts, please avoid clustering around the square power table with your faces in laptops. I've even seen tutors with their backs to the UWC entrance. If I were a client, I would feel like I'm interrupting a meeting or some sort of writing cult.
2. When you are not with a client, please sit facing the UWC entrance (front desk) area, so that you can greet people who enter (whether they are your clients, someone else's client, or a lost stranger). This is part of your job.
3. If a client sits down with another tutor at your table, please move to another space to give them privacy. I've seen a tutor working with a client while three or four tutors occupy the same table. If I were a client (or a new tutor), this would make me uncomfortable. We have a lot of space in the UWC. Use it!
4. If you have a request to swap a shift (which should be extremely rare), please send that directly to me. Only message Adrienne if you are sick or need to cancel due to an emergency.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Tuesday, September 6, 2016 10:20 AM: Late Tutors

Folks, if you happen to notice a UWC tutor showing up for shift right on the hour or especially after the hour, please let me know. I am documenting these, so that I can address the issues with tutors individually and refine our policies. I am not asking you to police the UWC, but, if you happen to notice a client waiting for a tutor or any other issues with professionalism, please let me know the tutor/day/time of the incident. Thanks!

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA

Monday, September 5, 2016 11:20 AM: Reminders from our meeting

Thanks for a great meeting, Friday! We are now open for the fall semester. Get pumped!

I know we presented a ton of information at the meeting, so here's a review for your reference.



Tutoring Practice: Remember to consult your Tutoring Roadmap handout to re-familiarize yourself with our Mission/Vision/Values, the marks of tutoring excellence, and the essential components of tutoring practice. I handed out copies of this, and you can find laminated copies by the nametag rack and the first cube in the UWC.

Important deadlines and dates. I handed out a list, but I've pasted those dates to the bottom of this message for your reference.

Title IX training. All JMU employees must complete this training. If you haven't done so, log in to Canvas and complete the training. It should appear as a course in your Canvas Dashboard. If you don't see it, send a message to CIT support: [citsupport@jmu.edu](mailto:citsupport@jmu.edu)

Jared Jay Featherstone, MFA