

The Writing Center at UW-Madison: An Overview

The UW-Madison Writing Center, which opened in 1969, has a staff of approximately 105, including academic staff, classified staff, graduate teaching assistants, and undergraduate Writing Fellows. Our mission is to support a strong culture of writing across the University, by providing short-term writing instruction to undergraduate and graduate students in all disciplines, instruction that helps them excel with writing assignments beyond introductory writing courses; supporting faculty and TAs across campus who assign writing in their courses; providing high-quality teaching and professional-development opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students who work as tutors; being a national leader in writing center pedagogy, programs, and research.

The Center provides writing assistance to c. 7000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. Our programs in brief:

- **individual consultations** about course papers, theses, and dissertations (at 9 locations on campus and online, including Helen C. White Hall [the main center] and satellite locations in the multicultural student center, the center for cultural enrichment, residence halls and residential colleges, Memorial Library, and College Library)
- **a curricular-based tutoring program (the undergraduate Writing Fellows program)**, which assigns tutors to work with students and faculty in selected writing-intensive courses across the curriculum
- **workshops**—short-term, non-credit workshops for undergraduate and graduate students on different aspects of academic writing; c. 60 sections each semester. Offerings include writing essay exams, writing about literature, writing graduate research proposals, senior-thesis writing groups, improving style, punctuation, writers' retreats, APA documentation, graduate research proposals, graduate school application essays, law and medical school application statements, research posters, resumes and cover letters, Rhodes scholarship essays, communicating with *PowerPoint*, presenting with *Prezi*, research proposals for Hilldale scholarships, Fulbright proposals, undergraduate research symposium proposals, literature reviews, Peace Corps application essays, Teach-for-America applications, cultivating a professional online identity, cover letters for academic positions, writing with *Scrivener*
- **dissertation camp**—in partnership with the Graduate School, the Writing Center offered its first week-long dissertation camp in summer 2011 (84 students applied for 18 spots), and offered three different dissertation camps in summer 2012 and in summer 2013
- **outreach** at the request of course instructors: Writing Center instructors consult with faculty and TAs about writing assignments and co-teach brief units on writing within many classes across campus
- **the online Writing Center** (writing.wisc.edu/) offers online reference materials for writers (some of the most widely used reference materials in the world for academic writing), answers brief writing questions, offers email advice about drafts and skype conferences about drafts (email advice and chats about drafts are for currently registered UW-Madison students), podcasts, a blog . . .
- **the Madison writing assistance program**, a community literacy program, funded by grants, at public libraries throughout Madison

- **Another Word**, our Writing Center’s blog (writing.wisc.edu/blog)
- a **social justice committee** dedicated to exploring and honoring diversity in all its many manifestations—including those that pertain to race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability, and sexual orientation—and making the Writing Center a safe, welcoming space for all
- a **computer classroom** for Writing Center workshops and for English Department composition and literature courses
- the **Madison Area Writing Center Colloquium**, which brings together writing center directors and tutors from Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois for discussions of writing center literature, theory, research, leadership and administration; the colloquium helps prepare doctoral students to direct writing centers in their faculty careers; writing.wisc.edu/colloquium.html

Some highlights about the UW-Madison Writing Center

- Students consistently give Writing Center instruction high evaluations. In anonymous evaluations during April 2013, the mean response about the helpfulness of Writing Center instruction from 778 students was 3.79 on a scale of 1-4 (with 4= “very helpful”).
- The Writing Center has been a key part of many campus initiatives. Our partners include the Graduate School, multicultural centers and programs, Chadbourne Residential College, Undergraduate Research Scholars, Undergraduate Symposium, writing-intensive courses, Pathways to Excellence, Pathways Scholars Program, the Summer Collegiate Experience, campus libraries, Teaching Academy, MTLE for New Faculty, DoIT’s Academic Technology . . .
- The UW-Madison Online Writing Center is one of the most widely used in the world; try a Google search on “annotated bibliography” “APA documentation,” or “writing center,” for example. Usage stats for one typical month (just *one month*): hits=3,892,000+; unique visitors=332,000+.
- The last four Rhodes scholarship winners and several recent Truman scholarship finalists and winners from UW-Madison all worked with Writing Center instructors.
- 30% of our instruction goes to graduate students from departments across campus.
- The Writing Center was chosen by the Dean as featured program for the first meeting of the Board of Visitors for the College of Letters and Science.
- Former UW-Madison doctoral students on our staff, in their faculty careers, are/were directors or associate directors of writing centers at, for example, Notre Dame (2 different directors), Minnesota-Twin Cities, Hamline, Marquette (2 different directors), Transylvania, Southeast Louisiana, Sam Houston, Kennesaw State, Belmont, Minnesota-Morris, SUNY-Stony Brook, UW-Whitewater, UW-Green Bay, Villanova, Lake Forest College, SUNY-Old Westbury, SUNY-Rockland, Mt. San Antonio College, Florida International University, University of Puget Sound, Clemson University, Case Western, University of Iowa, Catholic University, UMass-Amherst, Iowa State, Manhattan College, Suffolk University, Vanderbilt, Quest University, UW-Eau Claire . . .
- In July 2003 and then again in July 2008, the Writing Center hosted a week-long institute for writing center directors from around the country and from eight other countries, sponsored by the International Writing Centers Association; see www.writing.wisc.edu/institute2008.
- In October 2011, the Writing Center hosted the Midwest Writing Centers conference, which drew 310 participants; see writing.wisc.edu/mwca2011.
- Writing Center staff have frequently been consultants to writing centers and WAC programs at colleges and universities around the US and beyond, including Duke, UNC-Chapel Hill, Montclair State, Temple, University of Louisville, Washington University in St. Louis, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, University of Wisconsin-Richland, Marquette, Notre Dame, Cornell College, Kennesaw State, University of Illinois, Sungkyunkwan University (Seoul, South Korea), University of Wisconsin-Superior, Florida International University, Moraine Park Technical College (WI), The Ohio State University, Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan), Winona State University (MN), European University Viadrina (Germany) . . .

The Undergraduate Writing Fellows Program at UW-Madison

Co-sponsored by the Writing Center and Pathways to Excellence, the Undergraduate Writing Fellows program brings talented undergraduates and committed faculty together in a cooperative effort to improve student writing. The program carefully selects and extensively trains students from a wide range of majors. To prepare for their work, Fellows take an honors seminar on the theory and practice of peer tutoring across the curriculum, taught by Emily Hall, who leads the Fellows program. There are about 55 Writing Fellows each semester. Typically, 80 students apply each spring for the 30 spots open for new Fellows each fall.

Sample Courses with Undergraduate Writing Fellows

Introduction to African Literature and Culture
Health Policy and Politics
Latin American Economic Development
Atmospheric Science: Global Change
Major American Novelists
Geography of the Humid Tropics
Population Economics
Gender, Sexuality, and Reproduction: Public Health Perspective
Good, Beauty, and the Meaning of Life
Mexican Migration to the U.S.
Victorian Women Writers
Business and Society: History, Politics, Globalization

Drama of Henrik Ibsen
Western Culture: Literature and the Arts
Literature of Muslim Societies
Love Poetry of the Ancient Mediterranean
Medical History of Sex and Sexuality
The British Political System
Modern Latin America
Psychology of Well Being
Theories of Evil
Citizenship, Democracy, and Difference
Environmental Chemistry and Ethnicity
Art History and East Asian: Confucius

A Brief Guide to the Writing Fellows Process

1. Faculty teaching a Comm-B or writing-intensive course request to work with a Writing Fellow.
2. When Fellow(s) are assigned to course, Fellow(s) and professor work together to identify writing priorities and, ideally, to fine-tune writing assignments.
3. For two writing assignments in the course, students submit drafts of their papers to their Writing Fellows.
4. In consultation with the course professor and with WF staff, Fellows write extensive, detailed comments on the drafts, praising sections that are working well, raising questions where ideas aren't clear, and offering suggestions for revision.
5. Fellows then meet individually with each student for a half-hour conference to discuss students' plans for revising their papers. These meetings take place outside of the class—in coffee shops, campus libraries, or the Union.
6. Students then revise their papers and submit them—along with the draft and the Writing Fellows' comments—to the professor for grading.

The Letters and Science Program in Writing Across the Curriculum The University of Wisconsin-Madison

For faculty, instructional academic staff, and teaching assistants . . .

The University's Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) Program is eager to help you think about effective and creative ways to incorporate writing and speaking assignments into your courses at all levels and in all disciplines. Over 1700 faculty and teaching assistants at UW-Madison have attended WAC workshops or consulted with WAC staff. Among the many topics we could discuss in an individual consultation--

- designing writing and speaking assignments that match your learning goals for students
- connecting your assignments to the essential learning outcomes for liberal education
- expanding your repertoire of writing and speaking assignments, including brief, low-stakes writing
- incorporating writing and speaking assignments into introductory courses, FIG courses, laboratory courses, or advanced courses for majors and for graduate students
- sequencing assignments effectively
- clarifying your expectations for assignments and communicating those expectations to students
- anticipating problems students may have with particular assignments
- using proven methods for improving the quality of students' papers
- designing digital assignments, including blogs, podcasts, videos, wikis, websites . . .
- developing evaluation criteria for assignments
- reducing the risk of plagiarism
- responding effectively and efficiently to student writing and speaking
- working with the Writing Center and with the Writing Fellows program
- mentoring teaching assistants learning to give feedback on writing and speaking assignments
- developing communication-b and writing-intensive courses
- integrating writing and speaking experiences systematically across your department's undergraduate curriculum
- incorporating writing and speaking activities into your department's assessment plans for the major
- solving specific teaching challenges you've faced

The Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) Program publishes a sourcebook for faculty and instructional staff, with c. 300 pages of advice and successful examples of writing and speaking assignments drawn from courses across the University. The WAC program also offers workshops every semester on designing writing assignments, on responding to and evaluating student writing, and on holding conferences with students to discuss papers in progress. And we develop and lead custom workshops for faculty, instructional staff, and TAs within departments across campus.

writing.wisc.edu/wac

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