Division of Academic Affairs

University Writing Center

January 8, 2015

Gail D. Jacky, Director

1. History and Context

In 1989, the Department of English was given a Program Improvement and Expansion grant to establish a writing center for first year composition and cross-disciplinary students. The resulting Writing Center officially opened in 1991 and began providing support as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. In 2002, the Writing Center was separated from the Department of English; moved to Stevenson South, one of the student residence halls; and became the University Writing Center (UWC), an independent unit housed in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS). In 2004, the UWC was formally separated from the WAC program, although it continues to serve the WAC needs of faculty and students.

The UWC, as noted in the 2000 Request for New Administrative, Research, or Public Service Unit, was proposed to further Northern Illinois University's (NIU) mission that "students will need to learn throughout their lives and that the university will provide them with the opportunity to become more competent in analytical thought, informed judgment, and effective communication" and "help them acquire skills they need for the work force" by providing individualized consultation that "targets long-term improvement in students' written performance." As part of the justification, it was noted that a university-wide writing center was "essential to anchor the Writing Across the Curriculum [WAC] program within the university setting" and was a "cost-effective alternative to separate departmental or college tutoring services."

> Goals and objectives established for the UWC in 2000 included
> - tutoring FYComp students in writing
> - tutoring more advanced undergraduates and graduates in writing for other disciplines
> - supporting faculty who want to integrate writing as a major element of active learning in their courses
> - helping departments and colleges develop and implement effective large scale methods of assessing students' writing
> - familiarizing graduate assistants (GAs) and faculty with the most applicable uses of new technologies for teaching writing to undergraduate students
> - providing students and faculty with a high-tech writing environment where they can link cross-disciplinary courses whose instructional aims coincide
> - providing students and faculty help in developing projects with other academic institutions or local businesses and industries
> - offering returning students from local schools, businesses, or industries workshops in current writing techniques and technologies
> - organizing graduate students and faculty into writing groups so they may seek support for scholarly projects[1]

Twenty-four years later the UWC continues to be the resource NIU writers regularly use to navigate the writing for their academic assignments and personal documents and to understand

---

1 Northern Illinois University. (2000). Request for new administrative, research, or public service unit.

the organization, research, and presentation skills associated with those challenges. It has maintained its across-the-board client base, including English Language Learners (ELLs). Embracing Stephen North's philosophy, the UWC works hard to build better writers rather than to simply fix the clients' papers. Much of the anecdotal feedback shows that collaboratively discussing writing with one of the UWC coaches helps clients clarify their ideas and scaffold their skills, increasing their success and active engagement in their own learning.

The UWC is also one of the WAC resources faculty use to help them help their students "write to learn." UWC staff help support high teacher effectiveness through syllabi, assignment, and rubric review and in-class service and topic-focused presentations. It has also partnered with student organizations to offer services that meet NIU's stated mission and the needs of its writers.

> Its current focus is to
> - tutor writers from all six colleges and the Law School in personal, profession, and/or creative writing projects, including specialized programs for the Commuter and Non-Traditional students and the Honors Program students
> - provide tutoring opportunities for off-campus and non-traditional students through synchronous online sessions
> - support faculty who want to integrate writing as a major element of active learning in their courses
>   a. in-class topic-focused presentations
>   b. consultation on syllabi, assignments, rubrics, etc.
> - organize graduate students into writing groups so they may seek support for dissertation/thesis completion and/or scholarly projects
>   a. Dissertate in Eight (a summer dissertation support group)
>   b. Thesis support group for CEET students – in coordination with the Graduate School

2. Mission, Goals and Objectives

Mission Statement

The University Writing Center (UWC) provides Northern Illinois University's students, alumni, faculty, and staff with individualized mentoring and/or in-class support for writing tasks. By discussing ideas and their representation with trained writing coaches, writers learn to invent, research, and revise writing-based communication for multiple genres and mediums. Ultimately, UWC writing coaches seek to develop writers with the tools to communicate skillfully and powerfully within their academic, personal, and professional domains, now and in the future.

Unit Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: The University Writing Center will create environments that are supportive of the writing completed on NIU's campus.

- <u>Objective 1.1.</u> Secure the funding to staff the UWC to meet the clients' needs: writing coaches, technology, equipment/resources

- <u>Objective 1.2.</u> Provide qualified writing coaches who can create collaborative relationships with writers

- <u>Objective 1.3.</u> Create environments that are accessible, comfortable, and productive

Assessment methods:
Post-session exit surveys, interviews, UWC observations, UWC annual data

Goal 2: The University Writing Center will help writers develop awareness of the writing process and its related strategies and multi-literacy formats, from brainstorming to researching to drafting/revising/editing

- <u>Objective 2.1.</u> Help writers examine use of rhetorical/stylistic/multi-literacy strategies applicable to the discipline and/or intended audiences

- <u>Objective 2.2.</u> Support faculty writing and integration of writing as a major element of active learning in coursework through individual sessions, in-class presentations, and/or review of syllabi and course-related materials

- <u>Objective 2.3.</u> Support faculty's professional writing: articles, books, conferences, service reports/tenure documents

Assessment methods:
Collaborate with targeted class(es), pre-/post-semester surveys, pre-/post-grade surveys, grade/visit analysis, feedback form comments, post-session exit surveys, faculty surveys, interviews, post-presentation reflections, faculty research/writing productivity

Goal 3: The University Writing Center will provide practical hands-on experiences for the writing coaches through professional development opportunities

- <u>Objective 3.1.</u> Train writing coaches to work with writers with diverse assignments and backgrounds

- <u>Objective 3.2.</u> Offer writing coaches opportunities to conduct in-class topic-focused and/or service presentations and/or represent the UWC at resource fairs

- <u>Objective 3.3.</u> Involve writing coaches in the creation of hard copy and electronic resources/handouts for UWC writing coaches and clients

Assessment methods:
Pre-/post-semester interviews/goal setting, UWC observations, UWC training exam – pre and post training, writing coach-produced artifacts, presentation feedback (survey and reflections)

3. Assessment Methods

Assessment Method	Goal		
	1. create an environment that is supportive of writing	2. help writers develop awareness of the writing process and related strategies and multi-literacy formats	3. provide practical hands-on experiences for the writing coaches through professional development opportunities
Annual Assessment Report	S, D	S, D	S, D
Client Surveys – UWC services	F, D	F, D	
Feedback Form Comments	F, D	F, D	
Client Surveys – In-class presentations		F, D	S, I
Faculty Surveys – In-class presentations	F, I	F, D	S, I
Faculty Surveys – Perceptions of UWC	F, I		
UWC Observations - Informal	F, I	F, I	
UWC Observations - Formal	F/S, D	F/S, D	
Coach interviews – pre and post	F/S, D	S, D	S, D
Coach's pre-test/post-test training exam	D	S, D	S, D
Coach-produced resources		S, D	S, D

Explanation of Assessment Methods

Annual Report: The report is an overall documentation of the quantity and quality of the UWC activities conducted over the past year. Data for the reports are collected throughout summer, fall, spring, and intersession. The report includes client demographics and type of session as well as faculty/course and session focus information. Reports, beginning with 2013-2014, also include client and faculty survey results, comments from feedback forms, and assessment of the writing coaches' effectiveness and productivity.

Assessment Method	Explanation			
	Description	Assessment-Level Target	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible
Client Exit Surveys – UWC	The survey will seek information about the client's reasons for using the UWC services as well as their perceptions of the UWC practices. (See Appendix A)	At least 85% of individual clients will indicate they agree or strongly agree with the quality of UWC services On an aggregate level, 90% of the clients will agree or strongly agree with the quality of UWC services	Surveys will be distributed every 3 weeks throughout each semester, beginning with the second week	Director
Feedback Form Comments	The feedback forms document each UWC session, including the client's and writing coach's perceptions of what happened during the session. (see Appendix B)	Feedback form comments will demonstrate evidence that clients have a plan for their future work on the writing project after working with the coach	Feedback forms will be reviewed during the data entry process	Director

Assessment Method	Explanation			
	Description	Assessment-Level Target	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible
Client Surveys – In-class presentations	The survey will provide assessment of how the students perceived the effectiveness of the in-class presentations conducted by UWC staff.	At least 85% of individual clients will indicate they agree or strongly agree with the quality of the UWC presentation On an aggregate level, 90% of the clients will agree or strongly agree with the quality of the UWC presentation	Surveys will be distributed at the end of topic-focused presentations	Director
Faculty Surveys – post presentation	The survey will provide assessment of how the faculty of record perceived the effectiveness of the in-class presentations conducted by UWC staff.	At least 85% of individual clients will indicate they agree or strongly agree with the quality of the UWC presentation On an aggregate level, 90% of the clients will agree or strongly agree with the quality of the UWC presentation	Surveys will be emailed the day after a topic-focused presentation	Director
Faculty Surveys – Perceptions of UWC	The survey will seek feedback on what services the NIU teaching faculty members think the UWC provides, their knowledge of how the UWC functions, and what type of services they would like to see added.	15% of the faculty will send their students to the UWC	Surveys will be sent at the end of each semester to professors whose students have completed sessions at the UWC	Director

Assessment Method	Explanation			
	Description	Assessment-Level Target	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible
Faculty Feedback – Perceptions of UWC	Faculty send unsolicited email feedback regarding the support provided by UWC writing coaches	85% of the feedback will be positive	Emails will be collected more systematically than they have been	Director
Faculty Publication and Conference as well as Tenure and Promotion Success	Data will be collected from faculty regarding professional publications/conference projects/service reports/tenure applications.	• 50% acceptance of those who submit documents • 50% success rate toward tenure and promotion	• Records of acceptance and journal/conference ranking. • Records of tenure and promotion success.	Director
UWC Observations – Informal	Informal observations are conducted by the director and/or trainers to monitor UWC practices as preparation for weekly staff meetings and staff development/training. (See Appendix B)	90% proficiency on informal observation checklist	Ongoing observations throughout the semesters	Director or Trainer
UWC Observations- Formal	Formal observations will be conducted by the director, or designee, as part of professional development and reflection. (See Appendix C.)	Formal observations will ensure that the writing coaches are proficient at helping clients with decisions about content and organization as well as style/formatting and mechanics. It will also ensure the coaches are following UWC protocols.	Observations will be conducted during the second half of each semester	Director or Trainer

Assessment Method	Explanation			
	Description	Assessment-Level Target	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible
Coach interviews	The director will conduct a beginning of the year and an end-of-year exit interview with each writing coach to establish goals for his/her development.	Interviews will establish the writing coaches' goals and projects for the academic year. The interviews will also identify the coach's perceptions of their strengths and challenges.	Data will be collected at the beginning and at the end of the year	Director
UWC coaching skills test	New writing coaches will take a pretest/posttest of the skills related to working as a UWC writing coach	Trainees will score at least 90% on the posttest.	Data will be collected prior to starting training and after training is completed	Trainer
Coach-produced resources	Each coach will create writing-related documents (hard copy and/or electronic) to be used by either the clients or the UWC staff.	Writing coaches will create two writing-related documents: 1 discipline/course specific and 1 general topic.	Artifacts will be collected at the end of the semester and uploaded to the UWC website and/or put into the UWC resource repository	Director

Writer's Exit Survey
University Writing Center at Northern Illinois University

In our effort to provide efficient and effective services to meet writers' needs, we are asking for your feedback. Your answers will remain confidential unless you choose to put your name on this page.

1. **Why did you visit the University Writing Center (UWC) today? [circle one]**

    I was required.   I was referred.   I saw a presentation in my class.   My visit was voluntary.

2. **When did you first visit the UWC? [circle one]**

    Today   This semester   2013-2014 year   2012-2013 year   2011-2012 year   Other (explain):

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
My writing coach made me feel welcome today.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe my writing coach was well-trained and knowledgeable.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe the writing feedback was helpful?	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that working with my writing coach today will improve the grade I receive on my assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe the UWC provides an integral service to the NIU community.	1	2	3	4	5
I will use what I learned in my future writing?	1	2	3	4	5
I would use the UWC for my coursework in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
I would recommend the UWC to my friends and/or colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5

If there were one service the UWC could provide...

Other comments about the UWC:

Appendix B: Informal Coach Evaluation Form

1 = very weak   2 = weak   3 = reasonably good/average   4 = strong   5 = very strong

1.   Coach is on time for work.

       1   2   3   4   5

2.   Coach begins and ends sessions on time.

       1   2   3   4   5

3.   Coach interacts positively with clients.

       1   2   3   4   5

4.   Coach makes effort to learn aspects of writing s/he is unfamiliar with.

       1   2   3   4   5

5.   Coach interacts positively with other staff members.

       1   2   3   4   5

6.   Coach maintains an appropriate demeanor.

       1   2   3   4   5

7.   Coach demonstrates comfort working with diverse clients.

       1   2   3   4   5

8.   Coach makes clients feel comfortable through his/her methods.

       1   2   3   4   5

9.   Coach is knowledgeable about writing issues.

       1   2   3   4   5

10.   Coach encourages clients to return to UWC.

       1   2   3   4   5

Appendix C: UWC Session Observation Form

Coach _____

Date _____   Observer _____

What is the type of tutoring session? (first draft, outline, reading comprehension, etc.)

How does the coach begin the session?

How does the coach demonstrate her/his knowledge of the writing process?

How much time does the coach spend talking compared to the client? Does this seem appropriate? Why or why not? Additionally, what kind of interaction occurs between the coach and the client? How does this interaction seem to influence/reflect the session?

How does the coach go about getting the client to take responsibility for his/her own work? (i.e., ask student to take notes, model changes, encourage writer to ask questions)

How does the coach close the session? Does it end on time? Does s/he suggest a follow-up visit? Does the client seem satisfied with the session?

List specific suggestions for the coach:

Appendix D: Beginning of Semester Self-evaluation:

As you consider the coming semester, what do you think will be your greatest strength? What will be your greatest challenge? Why?

Set two goals and describe the strategies you will use to accomplish them? (e.g., learn more about working with English Language Learners, etc.)

What skills do you have that will contribute to enhancing the services provided by the UWC?

UWC Evaluation

What part(s) of the UWC daily operation do you think work well? (If you can answer this)

What suggestions do you have for improving the UWC? (If you can answer this)

End of Semester Self-evaluation:

As you consider the semester, what do you think was your greatest strength? What was your greatest challenge? Why?

You were asked to set two goals and describe the strategies you were going to use to accomplish them (e.g., learn more about working with English Language Learners, etc.). What progress did you make toward completing your goals? How successful do you think you were? What would you change in the future?

What skills did you develop that enhanced the services provided by the UWC?

UWC Evaluation

What part(s) of the UWC daily operation do you think worked well this semester?

What suggestions do you have for improving the UWC?