

**REQUEST FOR NEW ADMINISTRATIVE, RESEARCH,
OR PUBLIC SERVICE UNIT**

- 1. Name of Institution:** Northern Illinois University
- 2. Title of Proposed Unit:** University Writing Center (UWC)
- 3. CIP Code (6 digits):**
- 4. Proposed Date for Initiation of Unit:** August 2002

Purpose: Objectives, Mission, and Priorities

Northern Illinois requests authorization to establish a University Writing Center (UWC). An increasing number of universities nationwide have established university writing centers to anchor their programs in writing across the curriculum (WAC) to sound pedagogical principles. All of the Mid-American Conference (MAC) schools as well as the Illinois state universities have established cross-curricular writing centers. For example, the University of Toledo, Ball State University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Eastern Illinois University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago are exemplars, having developed writing centers that feature tutorials for all students at all disciplinary levels, online writing labs (OWLS), a core of highly qualified continuing staff, well-trained tutors, up to date technological equipment, central campus locations, and convenient hours.

5. Unit Objectives and Contributions

The goals and objectives of the proposed UWC include:

- A. Tutoring first-year composition students in writing.
- B. Tutoring more advanced undergraduates and graduates in writing for other disciplines.
- C. Supporting faculty who want to integrate writing as a major element of active learning in their courses.
- D. Helping departments and colleges to develop and implement effective, large-scale methods of assessing students' writing.
- E. Familiarizing graduate assistants (GAs) and faculty with the most applicable uses of new technologies for teaching writing to undergraduate students.
- F. Providing students and faculty with a high-tech writing environment (a "smart" classroom) where they can link cross-disciplinary courses whose instructional aims coincide.
- G. Providing students and faculty help in developing projects with other academic institutions or local businesses and industries.
- H. Offering returning students from local schools, businesses, or industries workshops in current writing techniques and technologies.
- I. Organizing graduate students and faculty into writing groups so they may seek support for scholarly projects.

NIU's request proposes a facility that will take into account its own unique strengths and its own students' needs. NIU has excellent hard-wiring capacity that will accommodate both the present and future technological development of the UWC. Student Housing has agreed to commit a section of the lower level of Stevenson Residence Hall, which provides not only ample, accessible space for the UWC (see attached diagram) but also contributes to the university's efforts to establish living-learning communities. The location of the proposed center in Stevenson has the added advantage of nearby parking and regular bus service to assure easy access for

students living on or off campus. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has employed a WAC coordinator who can help make strong connections between the UWC and general education courses as well as courses in specific majors.

NIU's strategic location in the corporate research corridor west of Chicago supports the need to provide its students with a high-tech facility to accommodate whole-class as well as individual and small-group writing instruction, which will prepare them for success in a variety of careers available in the region. The changing demographics of the northern Illinois region project that an increasing proportion of new NIU students will come from non-traditional backgrounds, increasing diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and older age groups, many who will require extra help in writing instruction in various academic disciplines.

The goals and objectives of this proposed center tie directly to NIU's mission in which the university asserts 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. The multiple and ever-changing demands of society require the continuing development of academic and professional programs that are current, responsive, and of the highest possible quality. The university hopes to maintain access for all segments of the population it serves, and, within the constraints of its budget, intends to admit those who can meet its entrance standards, to retain those who can benefit from its programs, and to educate students to the extent of their capabilities and desires.

The proposed UWC will translate the language of NIU's mission into salient instructional practices, offering a cost-effective alternative to separate departmental or college tutoring services. NIU history shows that in times of fluctuating funding, departmental or college-specific tutoring services can disappear, lose consistency with course aims, or lack the intensive supervision it takes to maintain quality control. Because the UWC will offer tutoring to all students, and because it will target long-term improvement in students' written performance, it will also address issues of equal access, uphold entrance standards, and reinforce the development of academic or programmatic standards. Moreover, scholarly research has demonstrated the positive impact of writing centers upon first-semester grade point average and upon later GPA with continued writing-center use (see Lerner, *Writing Center Resource Manual*, NWCA Press, 1998). This research also cites a positive relationship between higher GPA and retention, suggesting the UWC would help improve NIU's new freshmen four-year retention/graduation rate of approximately 50% (Office of Institutional Research, *Data Book* 1998-1999).

The goals and objectives of the proposed UWC will also contribute to the statewide priorities described in the goals of *The Illinois Commitment*. Goal 1 charges Illinois state universities to establish education and training programs that "will provide competencies in communication, problem solving, and teamwork as well as field-specific knowledge and skills." The individualized and small-group collaboration that the UWC will provide fits hand-in-glove with this exhortation, because its tutoring techniques derive from a pedagogy of writing for explicit audiences, writing to think critically, and writing as a response to instructive interaction.

Furthermore, the UWC's program of outreach resonates strongly with Goal 1 which charges state universities to "forge stronger partnerships with business and industry and with elementary and secondary schools." The UWC will help undergraduate students acquire the writing skills they need to enter the workforce. It will help graduate students acquire the pedagogical skills they must have for the teaching or the consulting skills they will need for other professions.

In terms of Goal 5, the UWC will enable NIU to "hold its students to even higher expectations and assess achievement of these higher standards" as a way of "maintaining and protecting the quality of instruction and the academic integrity" of writing across the curriculum at NIU. Its tutoring services will supplement instruction by providing a valuable recourse for professors who are not able to provide students with the individualized writing instruction that is often necessary for academic success.

A brief history will outline the demand for the UWC's services. In 1989, NIU received new state funding in the amount of \$99,600 to pilot a writing project within the Department of English. Authors of the grant wanted to provide students with tutorials in first-year composition, computer-assisted writing instruction, and a home base for a WAC program. The grant did not allow for fully extending computer-assisted instruction to all freshman English classes, but it did fund positions for a WAC coordinator and for tutors in first-year composition.

NIU's first WAC coordinator organized workshops that encouraged faculty from a variety of disciplines to integrate effective writing instruction in their courses. Follow-up, however, was disappointing because the first-year composition tutoring facility could not accommodate all the students from other disciplines who sought help. The volume of students in composition courses using the facility exceeded the tutoring resources available to the campus.

When the first WAC coordinator left the university, a second coordinator trained several graduate assistants (GAs) to work in departments or colleges that could partially fund them. With these funds students in the College of Business, the School of Nursing, and several departments in the social sciences were able to have access to tutoring services for writing. Unfortunately, funds from the departments and colleges disappeared in budget cuts in the early 1990s. The number of fully assigned cross-curricular GA tutors has dwindled to two, one who serves students in the Department of History, the Department of Political Science, and the Department of Sociology, and one who serves students in the Department of Psychology. The Department of Philosophy requires its GAs to rotate duties as writing tutors.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences sustained tutoring funds provided in the original grant for the tutoring facility for first-year composition, but the WAC coordinator's position again became vacant. In the meantime, the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology hired a tutor, and the College of Education established the Office of Instructional Assistance in efforts to meet the burgeoning demand for writing tutorials.

In spring 1999, NIU's Office of Assessment Services conducted a large-scale test of junior-level writing. Six hundred and seventy two students from all colleges with undergraduate programs in the university responded to the ACT Writing Essay CAAP. Both the ACT staff using its standardized scoring methods and an NIU team of readers using a holistic rubric scored these tests. Correlation of the scores was high and results suggested that from the freshman year to the junior year, no improvement in writing skills had occurred. During this same semester, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences authorized the hiring of another WAC coordinator.

The current tutoring facility for first-year composition can accommodate only four or five students at a time. The staff's technology support is limited to two outmoded computers. Temporary adjunct instructors in composition supervise the tutoring, but their temporary-faculty status has a negative impact on consistencies in the quality of supervision and tutoring from year to year. No formal training in tutoring is available for the three GAs or six undergraduates who assist with tutoring. The GAs' teaching experience is in first-year composition, not discipline-specific writing. The undergraduate peer tutors are all English majors, as well. Hours in the existing tutoring facility are limited, and no evening or summer-session tutoring is available for students. At peak times during the semester for the past several years, students from courses other than freshmen English have lined up in and outside the tutoring facility. The staff has not tallied the number of students who have been turned away.

6. Organization

The UWC will have a tenure-eligible director in an appropriate department (e.g. English). Ideally, this position will consist of a half-time appointment in the department where tenure will be held and half-time appointment in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The department will be represented in the search and consulted in the

process for approving the candidate. A tenure-line directorship assures not only continuity, but also sets expectations of the scholarly currency necessary to administrate the UWC. Tenure protects the security of the director's position as well, whenever budgeting priorities or other factors shift to new priorities.

The director of the proposed UWC will manage a yearly operations budget, hire undergraduate peer tutors, conduct weekly training sessions with all tutorial staff, and evaluate them as the equivalent of teaching a standard course. The director will call regular administrative meetings with supportive professional and clerical staff, make frequent appearances at department meetings, help the WAC coordinator organize faculty workshops, attend GA training sessions, and join in other faculty events to promote use of the UWC. The director will also oversee the acquisition of software and the development of an online writing environments, making these technologies available to university faculty. In addition, the director will supervise the development and maintenance of an online writing lab (OWL) and oversee use of the "smart" classroom; keep records of all UWC activities; prepare year-end reports to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the provost; work with the WAC coordinator to adapt writing center services to the needs of faculty across disciplines, helping them design syllabi and assignments that integrate writing in their courses; and collaborate with the WAC coordinator on assessing programs in writing for departments and colleges.

One FTE SPS position will be specifically designated for a specialist in instructional technology and computer-assisted writing instruction. This staff member will assist the director in maintaining and upgrading the equipment, software, online writing environment, and OWL. This staff member will also have tutoring duties and teach one course each semester. Two SPS positions will be specifically designated for specialists in writing instruction. They will share tutoring duties and teach one course each semester.

Two FTE positions for graduate assistants (GAs) will require tutoring duties and cross-disciplinary preparation, such as ENGL 600: Training in Writing Across the Curriculum.

Eight undergraduate students will serve as peer tutors.

One FTE Secretary IV will help the director manage writing center records, schedule use of the "smart" classroom, assist with staff scheduling, arrange student appointments, help match walk-ins with appropriate tutors, and fulfill other clerical responsibilities. Two undergraduate students will serve as receptionists during evening hours to document writing center records, arrange student appointments, match walk-ins with tutors, and perform other clerical tasks.

Outcomes

7. Unit Outcomes

By the third year of its operation, the proposed UWC will:

- A. Increase the number of tutorials for first-year composition students **by 50 percent.**
- B. **Increase the number of tutorials for more advanced undergraduates and graduates in other disciplines by 25 percent.**
- C. Increase the number of student-referrals from faculty who want to integrate writing as a major element of active learning in their courses **by 25 percent.**
- D. Establish a "writing fellows" program that matches GAs with professors of specific, disciplinary classes in **6 of the instructional colleges.**
- E. Play a major role in setting up a system of writing assessment for the College of Business; work with the College of Law to set up a similar assessment project for its sections of LAW 500 & 501: Legal

- Writing and Advocacy; support changes in the School of Nursing’s portfolio assessment in critical thinking; work toward a university-wide assessment system for junior level students.
- F. Increase the number of cross-disciplinary teaching assistants (TAs) and faculty who use email, web boards, listserves, chat rooms, and interactive web pages, to enhance the teaching of writing in their undergraduate courses **by 50%**
 - G. Establish an interdisciplinary link between such courses as Art 411: Advanced Visual Communication I and ENGL 403: Technical Editing through shared use of the UWC’s “smart” classroom.
 - H. Team with teachers of courses such as ENGL 496: Internship in Writing, Editing, or Training to develop projects with other academic institutions, or local businesses and industries and establish links with courses in the College of Business for similar projects.
 - I. Initiate **an annual** workshop in establishing a high school writing center for faculty from high schools in DeKalb, Sycamore, and Rochelle and invite local businesses or industries to send employees to a workshop on web page design.
 - J. Organize a cross-disciplinary thesis and dissertation network for graduate students, and hold a cross-disciplinary research writing retreat for university faculty.

8. Resources

In the current first-year composition tutoring facility, 531 (or 43%) of the 1,244 tutorials during the academic year 1998-1999 involved first-year composition students. As in previous years, the remaining tutorials involved upper-level students from courses in other fields. Below is a breakdown of those tutorials according to colleges:

College of Business.....	69
College of Education.....	205
College of Engineering and Engineering Technology.....	3
College of Health and Human Sciences.....	55
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.....	781
College of Visual and Performing Arts.....	9
Other (application letters, dissertations/theses, writing contests, grant proposals, conference papers, test prep e.g. GMAT/GRE, etc.).....	122

TOTAL 1998-1999 VISITS: 1,244

Two hundred and thirty four English as second language (ESL) or bilingual students account for the numbers listed.

A 1999 survey by WCENTER, the listserv of the national writing center network, shows that the annual *minimum* of students who typically visit an established UWC is 15% of the total enrollment. NIU had 22,473 students enrolled in 1998-1999. The WCENTER survey suggests that a potential minimum of 3,371 students might have taken advantage of working with the staff of a UWC during that year. This estimate does not account for how many students might have sought multiple tutoring sessions. Although this estimate is clearly speculative, the actual numbers for 1998-1999 indicate that at NIU, a student demand already exists for such assistance with writing.

This demand will grow significantly as NIU enrollment is influenced by projected increases in traditionally under-represented racial/ethnic groups. From the period of 1994 to 2005, the NIU Office of Institutional Research projects increases of 64.8% among populations of Hispanic high school seniors, 45.6% among Asian Americans, and 8.8% among African Americans. The 1998-99 tutorials with ESL or bilingual students indicate these NIU populations are especially motivated to seek extra help in writing, in addition to the more mainstream population.

NIU requests new state resources to establish the UWC.

Requested resources for staffing include the UWC director (10-months at \$45,000), three SPS (11-month FTE at \$36,000= \$108,000), one secretary IV (11-months or 1,650 hours at \$14/hr= \$23,100), GAs (two 9-month FTE at \$21,400= \$42,800), eight undergraduate peer tutors, and two undergraduate receptionists (11 months or 6000 hours at \$7.00/hr= \$42,000). The 10-month position for the director reflects reassigned time for scholarship, and the 11-month positions for the SPS, secretary, and peer tutors include reduced UWC hours for summer sessions. Except for the peer tutors, whose turnover rate is higher, the budget projects a minimum increment of 3% yearly raise, as shown in Table IV-2. Requested resources for staffing during the first budget year are \$260,900.

Requested resources for instructional technology include 45 computers at an estimated \$2,800 each (including network drop lines at \$126,000), a smart board at \$3,000, an overhead projector at \$300, a server at \$10,000, and three printers at an estimated \$2,900 each (\$8,700). Requested resources for instructional technology during the first budget year equal \$148,000.

Requested resources for one-time purchase of furniture include six office chairs, six staff room chairs, 20 conference chairs, six cubicle chairs, and 61 computer chairs, for a total of \$20,000. Six desks, two round tables, 28 computer tables, four hexagonal tables, and 19 meeting tables will amount to \$17,000. Cubicles and a reception counter will cost \$4,000. Requested resources for furniture equal \$41,000.

In addition to furniture, requested resources for non-recurring costs include carpenters (\$15,000), electricians (\$15,000), painters (\$8,000), and telecommunications (\$2,000), for a total of \$40,000.

The one-time request for furniture and non-recurring costs in construction (\$81,000) will be reallocated to an annual operations budget that includes such items as yearly updates or replacement of technology, software purchases, office supplies, contractual services, book purchases for a UWC library, and additional funds for hiring GAs or peer tutors as UWC services expand.

The grand total of the requested resources for the UWC is \$489,900.

9. Quality Assurance Processes

The proposed center will be added to the university's program review cycle and reviewed a minimum of every 8 years by the Academic Planning Council. The review will focus on the achievement of the stated outcomes of the center and the continuous improvement of the center's outcomes based on evidence from its assessment activities. In preparation for its first program review and the submission of its third-year progress report to the IBHE, the UWC will develop and implement an assessment plan.

The director of the UWC will write an annual report that constitutes part of the report that the WAC coordinator compiles. The WAC advisory board, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the provost will receive the annual report. This annual report will state the year's outcomes and consequent goals for the following year, vis-à-vis the university's mission and statewide goals. Progress toward longer-term objectives will appear in the report in terms of outcomes and/or refocusing of goals. The university will include UWC outcomes in its annual Results Report to the IBHE, as appropriate.

The director of the UWC will be held to the same processes established at NIU for the annual review of tenure-track faculty in departments, although the WAC coordinator will also submit an annual written assessment of the director to the department chair and the college dean. SPS will be reviewed annually as prescribed by Human Resource Services, including each individual's service report and a follow-up discussion with the director and

WAC coordinator. In turn, the director of the UWC will assess each semester's performance of the clerical staff, GAs, and peer tutors, keeping written evaluations on file for the WAC coordinator to review.

In addition to assessing student outcomes identified in part 7, the center will make provisions to solicit information from students who use the services of the UWC. Systematic assessment of students' satisfaction with the services provided by the center, the usefulness of software and other instructional materials, accessibility of the staff, and its hours of operation will inform the director and staff of the quality of the center's activities and progress in meeting its goals.

A determination of adequate support staff, equipment, and other resources will appear in the annual report that the director of the UWC and the WAC coordinator submit. When necessary, the director and the WAC coordinator will submit special requests as the college dean's or provost's offices advise.

To assure the UWC's effectiveness, the director and SPS will respond in consequent reviews to any concerns identified in previous reviews. Outside reviews by colleagues from the National Writing Centers Association (a division of NCTE) will also be conducted every five years, perhaps in conjunction with a WAC or writing center workshop or presentation. The UWC will respond to these outside reviews in writing and submit the response to the department chair, the college dean, and the provost.

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Table IV-2

TOTAL RESOURCES FOR THE NEW UNIT OF INSTRUCTION

	Budget Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year
1. Total Resource Requirements	489,900	497,727	505,789	514,093	522,646
2. Resources Available from Federal Sources					
3. Resources Available from Other Non-State Sources					
4. Existing State Resources					
5. State Resources Available through Internal Reallocation					
6. New State Resources Required (Line 1 minus sum of lines 2 through 5)	489,900				
Breakdown of New State Resources Required for Budget Year:					
7. Staff	260,900	**	**	**	**
8. Equipment and Instructional Materials	189,000	**	**	**	**
9. Library		**	**	**	**
10. Contractual Services		**	**	**	**
11. Other Support Services	40,000	**	**	**	**