Assessment of Miller Writing Center

2011-2012

Expected Outcomes: Usefulness to student clients
Students will find the sessions with Writing Center consultants useful for improving their writing or their habits as writers.

Assessment methods

Method: Student Evaluation Reports
Students will respond to multiple questions about each of their visits to the writing center.

Findings:
Only about 23% of our clients return the voluntary evaluation report (up from 20% in 2010-2011). As is typical for such evaluation forms for writing centers, the vast majority rate the experience excellent or very good. We had only 8 that rated the experience poor/unacceptable; only 4 replied that s/he would not return and only 5 that s/he would not recommend the MWC to others.

How did you use findings for improvement?
We continue to monitor the evaluations for problems that need attention, use them as appropriate in tutor training and consider ways to increase the rate of return. However, we continue to find the evaluations of limited value as an assessment tool.

Additional comments: None

Method: Usage analysis
Use statistics from appointment data base to analyze who uses the Writing Center, whether students return for multiple visits and variations across Colleges and sites. Track usage as a percentage of tutoring time offered.

Findings:
Usage of the MWC was consistent with usage in 2010-11.
- 2,081 different students in fall 2011 and spring 2012 came for 4,038 consultations.
- The MWC did 2,730 hours of tutoring during 2011-2012.
- 39% of our clients in both fall 2011 and spring 2012 returned for another visit during the term.
- The RBD site is the busiest, running at 80% utilization; across all sites the MWC ran at 50% utilization.

Usage varies across class standing and across majors/programs. Usage is heaviest by students in core courses (60%), 94% of which were appointments for English courses.
- 58% of all appointments were for English course assignments, down from 67% in 2010-2011.
- First-year students continue to be the biggest MWC user group (44%) and more of them return for multiple visits (first-year students average 2.075 visits).
- Juniors (17.4%) average 1.62 visits.
- Sophomores (15.1%) average 1.78 visits.
- Seniors (12.1%) average 1.52 visits.
- Graduate students (10.7%) average 2.6 visits.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**
First-year students continue to be the biggest user group, which is consistent with writing centers across the country. We will continue to track usage by class standing, and expect to see increases across the board over time. The decrease in percentage of students from English courses is a good sign: (1) students from other courses are using the writing center more and (2) instructors in English may have reduced their dependence on the writing center. We will continue to track this trend. We’ve shifted consulting hours to encourage students to use all locations and have added consultants at peak hours in RBD to meet demand. We continue to have conversations with Forestry and Architecture about the satellites they are funding. We will continue to track utilization across all sites. The absence of usage from students in first-year (core) courses other than English suggests either students are not writing in other core courses or they are not getting the message that they can use the writing center for other core courses. The OUW will initiate conversations about incorporating writing into the core curriculum and how best to support that writing. The MWC will continue sending information about our services—including class visits—directly to deans and department chairs. Our percentage of repeat appointments aligns with reported national averages when compared with similar institutions. The important question is whether students are returning across their time at Auburn and for what range of courses. We will begin tracking student use across semesters and years.

**Additional comments:**
None.

**Method: Evaluating WriteFest to support Graduate Student Writers**

**Findings:**
WriteFest was a replacement for the facilitated writing groups the OUW piloted in the spring of 2011 but found unsustainable because the cost per student was $500. The goals for WriteFest were to support graduate student writing and to introduce graduate students to Miller Writing Center services. WriteFest was designed specifically to provide graduate students with space, time, information, and support for their writing. Each three-hour event, held in the Student Center in the fall and RBD Library Learning commons in the spring, brought together graduate students from across the Auburn campus. Graduate students were able talk about writing with experts and other writers at similar stages in their programs. WriteFest provided opportunities to discuss the challenges writers face across disciplines as well as strategies for writing successfully.

- 39 graduate students attended the two WriteFest events in Fall 2011, 50 participants attended the six events in Spring 2012
- WriteFest cost $56.14 per student in Fall 2011, $24.98 per student SP 2012
- Graduate students attending WriteFest represented 10 of the 13 colleges at Auburn
Fall 2011 evaluations of WriteFest made clear that graduate students wanted similar events in subsequent semesters (4.58).

Graduate students were not highly motivated (3.13) by free giveaways or “fun” activities.

In Spring 2012 graduate students rated the usefulness of the information sessions (4.80), interaction (4.82), time to write (4.64), and writing tutors (4.62) highly. As they did in the fall, students expressed interest in attending WriteFest in the future (4.66). And, like the fall, the lowest evaluation score of (4.05) suggests that the refreshments are not the primary motivation for attendance.

Open-ended comments from the evaluations were overwhelmingly positive; examples include:

- “For some reason, coming here and writing in a different environment surrounded by different people really helps me.”
- “Wish we would have had this my 1st couple years in grad school.”
- “Please keep this going!”
- “I thought the event was well organized and enjoyable.”
- “Hope to have more meetings like this.”

We also note that one of the four students who won an Outstanding Dissertation Award had been a regular participant in WriteFest.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We tweaked WriteFest from Fall 2011 to Spring 2012 and again for Fall 2012 so that it is held regularly (6-7 times) each semester, continues to be held in RBD Library on Friday afternoons, and continues to provide writing related information and opportunities to discuss writing with experts from the OUW and faculty/staff across the university. In fall 2012, for example, faculty/staff from Auburn Libraries, the Graduate School, Building Sciences, the Honors College, Political Science, Engineering, and Geophysics (among others) will all make presentations/lead discussion sessions at WriteFest. The Office of University Writing also sought out partners to help promote WriteFest and to underwrite the financial cost; partners for 2012-2013 will include AU Libraries, the Graduate School, the Graduate Student Council, CADC, COSAM, Engineering, Forestry & Wildlife Sciences, and Liberal Arts. Increased promotional efforts include posters, flyers, AU Daily announcements, and a custom email message sent out by the Graduate School to all graduate students in advance of each WriteFest event. We will continue to assess costs, and we will collect feedback with a revised evaluation form.

Additional Comments:
None.

Expected Outcomes: Increased Scholarly Engagement

We expect members of the MWC staff to engage with and produce writing center scholarship because doing so improves the services we offer at the MWC and is an important professional opportunity for students.
Assessment methods

Method: Participation in regional/national conferences
Encourage consultants to plan and submit conference proposals and to attend writing center conferences.

Findings:
4 tutors proposed a panel session for the 2012 SWCA Conference in Richmond, KY, were accepted and attended the conference with the Coordinator for Student Services. Reflections from the SWCA conference demonstrate the value of conference attendance and presentations for peer tutors as the experience pushed them to think about their work at Auburn’s Miller Writing Center within the larger context of writing center scholarship. Notable excerpts from the peer tutors’ written reflections include:
- “Some of the sessions I attended really got me thinking about ways to expand the positive influence of my writing center on the rest of campus.”
- “Being at the conference really brought to my attention how far behind our state still is in many regards. I would like to see the state of Alabama start improving its image by more actively participating in SWCA, keeping its section of the website up to date, and taking initiative to host events.”
- “I enjoyed broadening my perspective by hearing other tutors and faculty members explain the different ways that their writing centers function. It was interesting to get to see another writing center’s space and to realize the impact space can have on the atmosphere of a writing center.”
- “Probably the best part of going was interacting with both the people I work with regularly, yet did not know very well, and meeting other tutors at the conference. There was a night where, after the Special Interest Group, we invited the people who attended the group to dinner with us, and that ended up being a very good idea. Hearing their takes on different things and their stories in general was a phenomenal experience, especially when put into the context of the common occupation, which we all share.”

How did you use findings for improvement?
The 2012 SWCA Conference was the first significant conference participation by peer tutors from the Miller Writing Center at Auburn University. We used this successful experience and process as a model for the rest of the MWC staff and encouraged others to submit proposals for future conferences. MWC consultants then submitted proposals to the 2012 NCPTW conference and the 2012 I-WAC conference; both proposals were accepted. We will continue encouraging and supporting MWC staff participation in writing center and writing related conferences.

Method: Creation of staff leadership positions
Findings:
Previously there were few opportunities for consultants to take an increased role in MWC administration beyond participating in workshops, events, etc. Additionally, the pay scale rewarded consultants for length of time on the staff, not for additional investment in the work or engagement with writing center scholarship. To create opportunities for interested consultants to engage more deeply with the work of writing centers from an
administrative and logistical perspective and to increase staff development opportunities, we created “Lead Consultant” positions on the staff, with a competitive application process which included reading/reflecting on writing center scholarship and doing written observations of MWC sessions.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**
For fall 2012, three consultants applied for these positions and all three were selected to be Lead Consultants for the 2012-2013 academic year. We will collect reflections from the Lead Consultants to make adjustments to these positions, the application process, and to assess the benefits of these positions to the MWC and the students who serve as Leads.

**Additional comments:** None