2013-2014 Assessment Report

Office of University Writing

Expected Outcome 1: Students and faculty will be aware of and use the services offered by the Office of University Writing

Students and faculty will be aware of and use the services offered by the Office of University Writing in support of writing and writing instruction.

Assessment Method 1: Usage data of Miller Writing Center from WCOnline Scheduler

Assessment Method Description
The appointment scheduler system we use (WCOnline) allows us to collect and analyze data about the students who use the Miller Writing Center. We compared this data to previous years following, in particular, overall use by unique users compared to overall number of appointments (repeat users), use by location, and use by colleges as a percentage of their enrollment.

Findings
Both users and appointments have stayed consistent over the last three years. 2012-13 had 2048 users making 4101 appointments. 2013-14 had 2008 users making 3999 appointments. We attribute the slight dip to the multiple campus closings in spring 2014 due to weather and bomb threats. Over the past three years, usage by class standing has been consistent, with the exception of a 5% increase in graduate student usage over the last three years. Usage by different majors also continues to be consistent, with slight variations that seem to coincide with fluctuations in the enrollment of different colleges. The RBD Library’s Learning Commons again is the most utilized of our six locations; at 77% usage, that location is functionally at maximum capacity (80% being full capacity in writing center best practice). Our five other locations have much lower usage; 58% at the Learning Resource Center, 48% at the Forestry Building, 41% at the Multicultural Center, 36% at the Architecture Library, and 34% at the SADC.

How did you use findings for improvement?

1. To push better utilization of all centers across campus, we have launched a location-specific advertising campaign targeting students in
various residential housing to communicate that there is a writing center near them. (see attached)

2. In an effort to improve our visibility in different majors, we have expanded our outreach to COSAM departments with events like our NSF-Graduate Research Fellowship Program workshop in September 2014.

• MWC Location Posters

Additional Comments
Assessment Method 2: Usability test of redesigned website

Assessment Method Description
In Spring 2014 we commissioned a usability test of our newly designed website. A graduate student from the Masters in Professional and Technical Writing program conducted the test with five faculty members and five students who were recruited from eight different departments and represented five different colleges. Scenarios were designed to ask participants to find particular documents or information on our site and included information about the Miller Writing Center, the ePortfolio Project, resources for faculty, and the creation and review of writing plans connected to the writing initiative. Participants were asked to use a think-aloud protocol throughout the test and usability testing software was used to record participants' facial reactions and on-screen actions, including keystrokes, mouse clicks, and the amount of time taken for each scenario. After the test, participants were asked to recall some of their experiences and re-shown portions of the website to facilitate a conversation. Finally, a post-test was given in which participants selected five adjectives from a list of fifty-five emotional adjectives, but this portion of the test was not used in the analysis/results because it was deemed by the testers to be inaccurate and poorly executed.

Findings
We have attached the entire report which outlines in more detail the results of the test. In general, all participants found the OUW website difficult to use, though the ePortfolio section of the site was somewhat easier to navigate than either faculty resources or the Miller Writing Center pages. Participants felt overwhelmed with too many options and too much content, and were confused by our terminology and the use of visual sliders as navigational devices. Participants liked the friendliness of the Miller Writing Center pages, but found the layout and extra information unhelpful. The faculty resources section received the lowest scores from the faculty who participated in this test and the testers were able to determine that faculty simply were not accustomed to expecting a website to provide resources such as the ones we have amassed there. Redundancy and confusing navigation and design
elements contributed to the frustration and length of time participants spent on the scenarios.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

1. Despite having just done a redesign of our site before the usability test was conducted, we undertook another major redesign of the site that would simplify the navigation, remove unneeded content, clarify terminology, and work with an organizational structure our users would more likely expect even when it created redundancy within the site. We have not been able to repeat the usability test on the newest redesign and there are sections that need additional attention, but we have received many positive anecdotal comments since the new launch at the beginning of August. As the graduate student conducting the usability test also worked on the redesign, we were able to immediately attend to many of the problems that the usability test revealed.
2. We hired a Communication and Marketing Specialist in September who has the skills to integrate our web presence with other marketing and information efforts. This hire will allow us to more systematically collect data about the usage of our website, email newsletters, and other efforts to reach faculty and students and allow us to better measure the awareness and effectiveness of our services.

- **Usability Test Report**

**Additional Comments**

**Assessment Method 3: Graduation Survey**

**Assessment Method Description**

Beginning fall 2012 we added questions about the ePortfolio Project to the survey given to graduating seniors each semester by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. Students are asked to respond to a range of questions about ePortfolios, but the survey question relevant to this outcome is: Have you heard of the ePortfolio Project? Data was provided to us for each semester and we compiled the data across the fall, spring, and summer terms in order to more easily compare the pilot year of the project (2012-13) with the first year of implementation (2013-14).

**Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Have not heard of</th>
<th>Have heard of the ePortfolio Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did you use the findings for improvement?
1. Since we did not do a campus-wide marketing campaign, we are pleased with the significant increase in the number of students who are aware of the project in only one year.
2. We are aware that the ePortfolio Project does not have a clear physical location where students can come for support. Instead, support is dispersed across the university through existing support structures (Miller Writing Center, Media and Digital Resource Library, Career Center, etc.) In order to better communicate where to find support, we have taken steps to increase the signage that identifies these support centers as places where students and faculty can get help with ePortfolios. We are also working to design a series of posters that faculty can use to indicate their familiarity with the project and signal to students that they can help mentor their creation and use of ePortfolios.

Additional Comments

Expected Outcome 2: Students and faculty will be satisfied with our services
We expect students and faculty to be satisfied with the quality of our services and programs.

Assessment Method 1: ePortfolio Student Workshop Evaluation Survey

Assessment Method Description
At the request of students, we piloted a series of five workshops for students who wanted to create an ePortfolio in the Spring term of 2014. Each workshop was offered twice, once on Mondays and once on Thursdays in order to accommodate different academic schedules. Students were allowed to sign up for the entire series or any specific sessions they wanted to attend. After the series was over, a Qualtrics survey was sent to all students who registered for any of the workshops, without regard to whether they actually attended or not. Students were asked to identify the workshops they attended and to rate particular activities or materials by how helpful they found them. They were also asked what other resources they had utilized (the Miller Writing Center, the MDRL, etc.), to describe their use of the resources available to them on our website, and to answer open-ended questions about additional resources they would like us to develop or how we might improve the workshop series. The survey was sent to 99 students and 19 responded for a return rate of 19%.
Findings
Though we had a total of 99 students register for the workshops, 21 did not attend any of the workshops in the series, 37 attended only a single workshop, 26 attended two out of the five offerings, 10 attended three, 7 attended four, and only 1 student attended the entire series. We take the drop off in attendance and the large number of students who registered without attending as problematic but typical; students often jettison extra-curricular activities as the semester wears on and they juggle academic responsibilities. Forty students enrolled from Nursing, and these students leave campus for clinical rotations as the semester progresses. We know that some students were encouraged by faculty to register, but did not bother to check their availability before registering.

Responses on our survey, though small, were overwhelmingly positive with nearly all responding that each of the activities and worksheets were very helpful or somewhat helpful. Students also reported making use of the resources on our website, especially the gallery of examples. Suggestions made it clear that students wanted more help with the technological features of the different platforms and more time to practice in the presence of others so that they could ask questions. They wanted the sessions to stay interactive. Some expressed concerns about the timing of the workshop and wanted options that would allow them to come after work/classes. Positive comments made it clear that developing "portfolio thinking" and having time to collect and arrange artifacts required that students participate in a more consistent way rather than randomly attend sessions they thought they wanted. Students who have no experience with ePortfolios simply could not determine from the titles or descriptions we provided which sessions would be most helpful to them.

How did you use findings for improvement?
1. Based on the feedback we received and the quality of the ePortfolios that resulted from the workshops, we will continue offering the student workshop series.
2. We have changed the series to require that students commit to the entire series, but where absences are unavoidable, students can arrange to meet with the ePortfolio Graduate Assistant to review the material they missed.
3. We added a sixth workshop focused on visual literacy elements.
4. We revised the session focused on technology to provide more structure to help students learn the features of the platforms.
5. We have been unable to alter the timing of the workshops to accommodate those students who work or have classes during the day. We are considering how to provide additional resources online.
6. We will include the survey as a part of the final workshop in order to increase the response rate.

Additional Comments
Assessment Method 2: WriteFest and WriteFest BootCamp participant comments
Assessment Method Description
We administer Qualtrics surveys to graduate students who participate in the WriteFest program for graduate students during each semester and to those who participate in the twice-per-year WriteFest Dissertation and Thesis BootCamp. Numerical scores on these surveys remains very high with the lowest mean score at 3.88 on a 5 point scale (for the question "how likely are you to participate in the writing group after WriteFest?") and the highest being 4.75 (for the question "I appreciated the time to write"). Scores cluster so closely to together that we decided to focus on the open-ended comments to the questions "What do you like about WriteFest?" and "What suggestions do you have for improving WriteFest?"

Findings
What do you like about WriteFest?

- The consultants were available and helpful. They asked me what I wanted help with and supported me in what I needed to do. I liked having snacks. It was nice to see other grad students and hear about their writing goals.
- The lecturer was really fun. Also, he showed some tips to correct general grammar mistake that it is really helpful.
- I liked the open atmosphere for discussion, and the time to write as a large group.
- It surprised me how much it helped. I got to learn about writing in different disciplines.
- Free coffee and snacks while writing. :)
- Good food, good people. I like having structured time to write, but I will probably only come if I have a specific project for a class.
- good and helpful consultant
- I like the entire program and the motivational tips for getting through the process.
- To help us to improve our English
- Writing tutors are very nice and helpful. I love the feeling that setting a period of time only for writing and enjoying coffee. I think restaurant is a good place for WriteFest.
- I liked the availability of consultants even though I didn't use them that time, and I liked the feeling of being sort of "trapped" in that room, held accountable by adhering to social norms of participating

What suggestions do you have for improving WriteFest?

- The seminar on editing your own writing presented good information but it was too long and the pace was too slow. I wished it would have been shorter so I could have worked with the consultants longer and gotten more of my own writing done. This suggestion reflects my goals for WriteFest -- using the time to write intensely and productively.
Examples relate to correction of grammar mistake can be more.
Can there be a session of strategic planning for writing a long piece of work (ie, outline sections, titling the subsections, bullet subtopics, details, "flow and connection" of ideas...)? It is just an idea.
Do it more frequently!
may be longer time duration. 4-5 hours.
Invite more teachers to help us
None so far! I was very impressed. I came in a skeptic.

Likewise, comments and suggestions for WriteFest BootCamp appreciated the time to write, the food, organization with structure and support but flexibility to let individuals use the time as they needed to, the location and facilities, and the general atmosphere. Students found that being in the presence of others who were writing motivated them to write as well, and some students did form ongoing writing groups after the Spring BootCamp. Most of the suggestions for the BootCamp had to do with offering it more often, for longer periods of time, and expanding to include more participants.

How did you use findings for improvement?
1. We shared the information we had collected and our analysis of costs with the Graduate School, which co-sponsors these programs. We have all agreed to continue both WriteFest and WriteFest BootCamp.
2. We will continue to offer WriteFest at least four times each semester utilizing the RBD Library Learning Commons. We will repeat the Spring BootCamp at the Athletic Center and the Summer BootCamp at the Vet School.
3. We will expand publicity and outreach to increase participation from underrepresented colleges and populations of students.
4. We will develop additional programs of support strategies with each of these existing programs to better support the many international students who are registering for these programs.
5. We will continue to pursue other events and support for independent graduate student writing groups since doing so will better equip graduate students to find their own communities of writers when they leave their graduate programs.

Additional Comments
Assessment Method 3: WriteBites evaluation survey

Assessment Method Description
We administered a Qualtrics survey to all faculty who registered for the WriteBites: The Lunch program without regard to whether or how often they attended. Participants were asked which programs they attended, to evaluate the usefulness of the materials that accompanied the discussions (sometimes given in advance of the discussion, most often given afterwards), to report what strategies or ideas, if anything, they had used immediately or planned to use in the future, and whether anything they had heard at the lunches connected to their research
interests. Faculty were also invited to answer an open-ended question to provide suggestions for making the program better.

**Findings**
Attendance at the lunches was fairly consistent throughout both fall and spring semesters and most who registered attended and participated. Participants reported that they valued hearing from others, sharing strategies, and having the opportunity to interact with faculty outside their own departments and colleges. Most participants reported that they were able to use ideas or strategies immediately or planned to do so in the future. Fewer participants reported reading the articles or book chapters provided, but found the handouts of examples and the summary notes provided after each session helpful. Most participants reported they did not see a way to connect what they heard to their research interests but two reported that they were pursuing a collaborative teaching idea that emerged in the discussion and several reported that they would be willing to present their own work with teaching at local or national conferences. The most common suggestion was to find a way to offer the lunches at times that would better accommodate teaching schedules.

**How did you use the findings for improvement?**
1. We flipped the day for the lunches from Wednesdays to Tuesdays in the Spring as we had planned and then rotated the cycle for the 2014-15 year so that fall term the lunches are on Tuesdays and spring will be on Wednesdays. We see no way to accommodate all possible teaching schedules and stay within our budget for this program, but rotating by semester seems more viable and less confusing that rotating the day each month.
2. We have lessened the amount of formal scholarship we distribute either before or after the lunches; faculty simply don't have time for this additional burden and didn't find this scholarship as relevant or accessible as we had hoped.
3. We have invited faculty who participated in WriteBites: The Lunch to present their work to others at other programs like the Conversations in Celebration of Teaching or to let us feature them and their strategies in the WriteBites: On line feature on our website.

**Expected Outcome 2: Students who work for us as tutors, interns, or ePortfolio Ambassadors will demonstrate an ability to evaluate their work for our office and synthesize their experiences with their academic and personal goals.**
We employ both undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of roles. In each case, however, we design training, assign tasks, and promote practices that encourage students to align their academic and personal goals with the activities they take on for our office. Our goal with this practice is to have students be intentional and reflective
about their involvement with the co-curricular work they undertake with us and the relationship between that work and their long term aspirations and self-assessment.

**Assessment Method 1:** Reflective practice in the Miller Writing Center

**Assessment Method Description**
The Miller Writing Center assessed the student staff’s ability to think critically about their work through an end-of-semester reflection writing exercise. Each writing consultant and front desk worker was required to submit an essay that asked them to describe and reflect on their experiences, their personal development over the semester, their progress toward the goals they set, their engagement with the professional development activities, and their response to the student surveys from WC Online.

The reflections were first read to get an overall sense of the staff’s ability to engage thoughtfully with the work they do. Then a rubric was developed to see if there was any measurable increase in the staff’s depth of critical thinking over time and to see if particular areas of weakness and strength could be identified. Following Kember et al (2008), this rubric was designed to assess four categories of reflective thinking, with each writing sample read as a whole and the moment of highest reflection recorded. We used Kember et al’s scale and definitions: 1) Habitual action: no reflective thinking or thoughtful engagement, merely repetition of the prompt and empty cliché. 2) Understanding: a limited review of events and concepts without connections made or depth of analysis; while there is evidence that knowledge has been acquired, there is no clear critical engagement. 3) Reflection: events and concepts are not just reviewed, but connections are made between diverse concepts and experiences, and meaning is developed through active, applied thought. 4) Critical Reflection: events, concepts, theories are synthesized using significant high-level critical thinking, leading to significant transformation of the writer’s understanding of her/himself and the world. The rubric we developed integrated these categories of reflective thinking on four different categories that were included in the various reflection prompts: 1) Discussion of Tutoring Experiences, 2) Goal Setting and Development, 3) Engagement with Peers and/or Student Surveys, 4) Self-assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discussion of Tutoring Experiences</strong></th>
<th>A “4” Reflection</th>
<th>A “3” Reflection</th>
<th>A “2” Reflection</th>
<th>A “1” Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences are synthesized and lead to thoughtful conclusions, with new learning about tutoring clearly articulated.</td>
<td>Detailed descriptions that are connected together to establish patterns of understanding about the individual’s experiences.</td>
<td>Reasonably detailed descriptions of experiences that show more depth of engagement with events.</td>
<td>Vague descriptions of experiences that show little or no understanding and reflection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal Setting and Development</strong></td>
<td>Deep understanding of goals are synthesized from experience and development activities</td>
<td>Goals and progress thoughtfully analyzed and connected to experience, but not deeply connected to broader theoretical ideas and/or future progress</td>
<td>Goals are described with reasonable clarity, with a gesture toward change over time.</td>
<td>Goals are indefinitely and mechanically defined in response to prompt</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement with peers, development, and/or student surveys</strong></td>
<td>Developmental activities and tutoring experiences are synthesized into new, clearly articulated understanding of tutoring</td>
<td>Connections and recognize patterns across tutoring experiences and developmental activities</td>
<td>Descriptions show reasonable understanding of developmental activities, but not depth of thinking</td>
<td>Developmental activities are described vaguely and mechanically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Patterns of strengths and weaknesses are synthesized into a new, well-articulated sense of self-awareness of the writer’s approach to her/his work as a tutor</td>
<td>Thoughtful recognition of patterns of strengths and weaknesses, with thought given towards future development as a tutor.</td>
<td>Articulation of strengths and weaknesses without significant depth</td>
<td>General and clichéd in approach and tone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses often addressed more than one category, though the prompt only expected a single focus.

**Scoring**: Three scorers familiar with the work of the writing center participated in a norming session using the rubric on sample reflections and then scored all 176 reflections submitted over the last six semesters.

**Reference**

Findings
Our analysis of the reflections showed that individual tutors thought very deeply and critically about their work—they were able to articulate theoretical approaches, apply those theories to specific and well-described experiences, and craft insightful understandings of their own work and writing center work in general. But this deep level of critical reflection appeared in a minority of responses. Most consultants simply repeated vague truisms about the virtues of tutoring and the good times they had working with students. While it is good that the staff articulates such positivity, the responses in general show a lack of deep thinking. Moreover, from 2011-2013 the reflection assignment, while mandatory, had very low return rates of about 60%. In 2013-14 measures were implemented to encourage compliance and rates grew to near 85% (the only non-respondents were graduating staff). Still, even with this increased response rates, the reflections generally lacked depth.

Scoring:
The rubric-based scoring supported our general impression that the staff was not engaged with the reflection exercise.

Average overall score by semester:

- **Fall 2011**: 2.18
- **Spring 2012**: 2.36
- **Fall 2012**: 2.27
- **Spring 2013**: 2.27
- **Fall 2013**: 2.39
- **Spring 2014**: 2.41

While there seems to be a small upwards trend, it seems an insignificant change and the low scores demonstrate a lack the high level critical thinking. When sorted by the four topics defined by the prompt, the numbers became even less useful for understanding whether the staff was synthesizing their experiences and thinking deeply about their work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
<th>Spring 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion of Tutoring Experiences</strong></td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal Setting and Development</strong></td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement with peers, development, and/or student surveys</strong></td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Assessment</strong></td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addressed all four elements of the prompt</strong></td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The lack of variation between the different topics, the wide variation across the semesters, and the confusion about the prompt, give us little confidence that this assessment method is useful.
How did you use findings for improvement?
The strong individual responses argue that the potential for depth of reflection is present. Additionally, the initial low return rates suggest that the staff has not seen this writing exercise as an important part of their professionalization--just as another hoop to jump through. And the extreme variations in student responses suggests that the prompt is too broad to allow for a clear assessment. So we will continue our semester reflection exercise with significant changes.

1. The prompt will be significantly simplified, with a focus on the tutor a) describing significant day-to-day experiences at the writing center, b) articulating an understanding of writing center pedagogy, and c) synthesizing theory and practice. This simplified approach will allow for both deeper intellectual work by the tutors and for the responses to be assessed for strengths and weaknesses across the three categories.

2. Reflective writing will be done more than once in the semester, "scaffolding" the reflective skills the staff is being asked to develop with an opportunity for feedback to deepen and develop their skills. In the fall 2014 the staff will produce a mid-semester reflective statement describing and evaluating a particular session from the semester; feedback will be given. An end-of-fall-semester reflection will ask each tutor to identify and summarize a specific piece of writing center scholarship and connect it to a lived experience. Both the initial mid-semester reflection and the final semester reflection will be collected and assessed. Feedback will be provided and staff training activities will be developed based on the findings.

3. In the spring of 2015, ePortfolio development will be integrated into staff training. The staff will be asked to develop their own "tutoring philosophy" as part of their ePortfolio. They will draft different parts of this reflection (theory, practice, synthesis) as they define and revise their tutoring philosophy. Tutors will be asked to also provide evidence of revision and how they used the comments from others to develop the final tutoring philosophy document. The final ePortfolios will be assessed by a team of reviewers looking specifically for evidence of a) description of experience, b) summary of scholarship, c) synthesis of theory and practice, and d) evidence of revision and use of comments.

Additional Comments

Assessment Method 2: Student Self-Assessments

Assessment Method Description
Both undergraduate and graduate summer interns and ePortfolio Ambassadors were asked to complete a written activity to set goals at the beginning of their work with our office and then to share with us a short written self-evaluation at the end of their experience. We asked all students to address two different areas in their written statements to us: 1) reflect on the experience, what you got out of doing this work, and 2) what we could do in the future to make the positions better. Six summer interns and two student ePortfolio Ambassadors completed the self-evaluation activity.
Findings
The student self-assessments/reflections were read and statements were categorized into broad categories such as: a) identified new skills they had learned, b) identified technologies they had learned or practices, c) reported connections between the activities they did and their future plans or aspirations, and d) identified specific aspects of the work that could be improved.

1. All eight students were able to identify new skills they had learned from the experience of working in the OUW, with the most common of these being non-cognitive skills like problem solving, collaboration skills, planning and organizing, managing their own time, solving problems, and being stretched out of their comfort zone especially in relation to talking with faculty.
2. Seven made explicit connections between the work they were asked to do, the skills they acquired, and their future plans or aspirations.
3. Six mentioned learning new technologies they would not have encountered in their academic programs.
4. Six identified a specific aspect of the work that could be made better in the future with several identifying the need for more structure or guidance.

How did you use findings for improvement?
1. Because all of the interns identified non-cognitive skills that connect to their future goals but that would not necessarily be a part of their academic studies, we will continue to offer summer internships to undergraduate and graduate students.
2. We will strike a better balance between flexibility and structure by collecting and discussing the goal setting activity as we assign specific tasks and by reducing the number of interns so that those we do hire can work longer and have time to learn the new skills and come together as a working team before encountering the pressures to complete the assigned projects.
3. Because the interns identified the technologies they learned as valuable additions and reported that the sessions with the MDRL were particularly helpful, we will coordinate with the MDRL to provide these tutorials earlier and in a more systematic way.

Additional Comments