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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA
CENTER FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE
SPRING 2008 REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) enjoyed a very successful first year of formal operations. This year, the Center for Writing Excellence adopted an expanded mission and started new activities to meet a wider range of writing needs, while meeting the challenges it faces as part of a growing and changing campus.

As a reconceptualization and expansion of the University Writing Center idea, the Center for Writing Excellence has at its core a mission emergent from the *UNA Strategic Plan*. That mission is to provide high quality support for students, both on and off campus; to provide professional development opportunities for faculty as they develop high quality programs, and to build town-gown relations through the common literacy link. The CWE has three components: the University Writing Center, the Writing Across the Curriculum & Writing in the Disciplines

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) maintained its Fall 2007 standards during the Spring 2008 semester. It grew in some ways, but also suffered because of its spatial limitations. In the University Writing Center (UWC), an increase in the staffing and supply budget allowed for more and consistent staffing with more experienced, paid tutors. Increases occurred in the overall number of student contacts, the number of students who participated in tutorials, and the number of tutorial sessions. Workshop and tutorial evaluation scores remained high. Furthermore, an online tutorial program was successfully piloted with two courses in the College of Nursing. Clearly there were many successes.

However, challenges in the University Writing Center remain. The scheduling conflicts created by a lack of dedicated space have not been resolved. The number of different students who used the lab space and the number of faculty requesting workshops and orientations decreased slightly. While the Writing Center met and greatly exceeded its retention goal for International student tutorials, it failed to reach the goals for EN 099: Basic Writing and Project OPEN nursing student tutorials.

Progress has also been made in the other components of the Center for Writing Excellence. The WAC/WID Professional Development Series offered its first workshops, and the first community outreach activities have begun development. These activities include a workshop contribution to the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library One Book Program and the creation of a writing center at Florence High School. There is still plenty of room for the Center for Writing Excellence to grow and improve, but the university can be proud of t

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- ...ssible creation ...teer community writing centers
- ...er program... ...sed by the community and permitted by funding.

This mission is ...sisten... ...mponents of the University of North Alabama *Strategic Plan*. The University ... ...C/WID Professional Development Series strengthen the university comm... ...hance basic competencies/skills: (a) math; (b) writing; (c) reading; (d) ti... ...dy; and (f) life and career planning (p. 10), either by working directly with stude... ...faculty work with student writing. Community Outreach recognizes that "U... ...ng community as an intellectual nucleus and strives to maintain a sense of coh... ...munity by working collaboratively, disseminating information, providing ... ., and cultural experiences, and offering assistance to businesses and schools" ... ...seeks to improve the literacy skills of regional students, especially those who may ... ...elping combat the local dropout rate.

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

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Data Collection Method & Limitations

In order to record contacts, students who visit the University Writing Center are asked to sign a log book, providing their name, professor and course for their work (where applicable), their arrival time, and their departure time (recorded when they leave). Students are also asked to identify their purpose for visiting the UWC by checking the appropriate choices from one of these three options: Tutoring, Work/Study Time, and Break/E-mail. This is an imprecise means of collecting quantifiable data beyond a record of overall use for three major reasons. First, students do not always list professors and courses, and sometimes neglect to include arrival and departure times. Second, the purpose for the visit can change,

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Remember that the use rate measures the occupation of the computer lab by a single student at any given time, so that if one student stays in the lab for an hour, then the lab will have 100% use rate for that hour. As a result, use rates routinely stay above 100%, sometimes reaching 200% or even 300%, indicating that an average of 1-3 students used the computer lab for every hour that it was open during a given month. Figure 4 shows the use rates for the 2007-2008 Academic Year, expressed in percentages.

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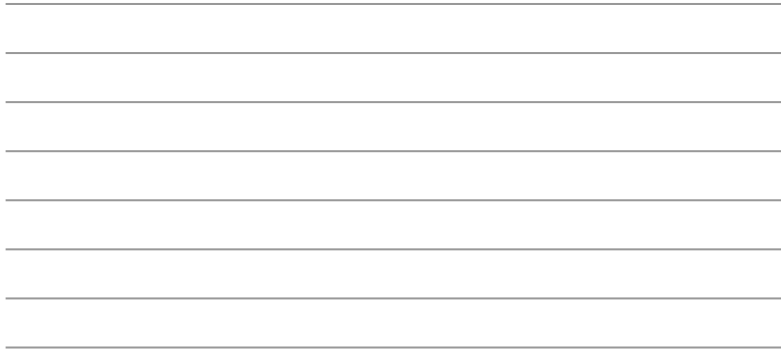
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In December 2007, monthly average use rates crossed 350%, meaning that at least three students were present in the Writing Center during its hours of operation. By comparison, average monthly use rate in April just passed 200%, meaning an average of at least two students were present in the Writing Center during its hours of operation. Figure 5 demonstrates a similar trend, showing that the December average use time, measured in minutes, exceeded the April average use time by nearly 10 minutes.

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This data suggests that the Writing Center is serving primarily as a resource for students with one-time or assignment-based needs. There is, however, a small and established clientele of about 35 students who use the Writing Center as a regular resource for their writing needs; many of these students are different from those 32 students who were regular attendees in Fall 2007. The data clearly shows that although there has been growth, more work is needed to increase the number of students who receive multiple tutorials. In addition, a combined quantitative and qualitative study of the established clientele from the 2007-2008 Academic Year is needed to learn more about this demographic.

<div align="center">Writing Tutorial Use Rates</div>

Writing tutorial use rates are determined using a similar procedure to that outlined in the section on computer lab use rates. Although the mathematical formulas are identical, the difference between the two is that estimated data is determined from tutorial session forms prepared by each tutor instead of the daily log book. As shown in Figure 7, use rates generally have averaged between 30-50%, meaning the tutor is engaged in tutorials during that percentage of the time that the UWC is open.

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The sharp climb in April tutorial use rates is again directly attributed to the involvement of students in NU 406: research in Nursing. Although students from the course visited the UWC with group projects, and were tutored in groups

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Average use time remained between 30-40 minutes per tutorial for most of the year, although tutorials began to run longer toward the end of the Spring 2008 term. In Composition and Writing Center research, 30 minutes is generally regarded as the most time a tutor should spend working with a student in any one session: beyond this point, the writer begins to feel overwhelmed by the quantity of feedback.

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One cause for the upward turn in average tutorial length may be a strategy tutors have permission to employ if there are an overwhelming number of students in the UWC. More skilled tutors may start a student working on a writing issue, then assign that student some task related to solving the issue, then start a second student on his or her issues, and then return to check on the first student. The result of this practice is that tutorial sessions often take longer, but more students receive some assistance. Though not optimal, this practice alleviates the pressure of having a half dozen students arrive for help all at once, as has happened on several occasions.

<u>Departmental Representation</u>

The charge to develop a *University* Writing Center has clearly been met once again from the perspective of courses represented in writing tutorials. Figure 10 shows those departments with 10 or more tutorials in both Fall 2007 and

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Liberal Arts Writing Courses (EN 111 and EN 112) still outnumber tutorials for students in most other departments and colleges, but a strong presence has been established from all four Colleges and from multiple departments within the College of Arts and Sciences. Tutorials offered to College of Business students were mostly requested by graduate students in CIS and Economics courses, as well as the MBA program, but several were also requested by undergraduate Management and Marketing students. In the College of Nursing, 17 tutorials were from an online writing center pilot program tied to NU 418: Nursing Concepts, Issues, and Theories and NU 501: Advanced Nursing Research.

<div align="center">Online Writing Center Pilot Program</div>

In Spring 2008, the UWC joined with faculty from the College of Nursing to implement a pilot online writing center support program. The Nursing faculty, specifically Dr. Teresa Leonard, Dr. Lynn Aquadro, Dr. Wanda Bradford, and Prof. Linda Austin, recognized a need for writing support. This need also coincided with a call for increased Distance Learning support in the *UNA Strategic Plan* (2007, p.9).

The Nursing faculty selected NU 418: Nursing Concepts, Issues, and Theories and NU 501: Advanced Nursing Research to be their pilot courses. The means of support would happen through the discussion board and dropbox features in the eCollege distance learning platform. These asynchronous tools were chosen because of a lack of available tutoring time on the part of Dr. Robert Koch, the tutor for this program. Asynchronous technologies would allow delayed feedback, providing opportunities to review documents in the evenings or on weekends.

In NU 501, no students used the dropbox for essay responses. However, 9 students in NU 418 used the dropbox feature to solicit responses for 17 drafts:
- 6 students submitted 1 draft each
- 1 student submitted 2 drafts
- 1 student submitted 3 drafts
- 1 student submitted 6 drafts

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the complete instructions provided on the survey itself), and placed in a business envelope in the mail slot where completed tutor session forms were kept. The Director would check this slot daily to collect both session forms and evaluations, which would then be entered into an excel spreadsheet. Evaluations were then stored in a cabinet in the Center.

In the Writing Tutorial evaluations, students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with 8 statements, recording their answers on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 is completely disagree and 5 is completely agree. Not Applicable (NA) was offered as an alternative response. In Fall, 199 responses were collected; in Spring, 436 were collected. Figure 11 provides the average scores for each statement

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"I am continuously learning how to improve my writing. The tutors are amazing"

"I met J.T. Bullock at the writing cente

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- APA/Other styles in class
- How to better structure long assignments (internal due dates)
- Journaling
- How to help students develop ideas better
- How to help International students with their writing
- Reverse outlining
- Assignments that help focus a single topic
- Source research
- Assessment Rubrics / How to Grade Objectively
- How to do effective short papers
- How to prepare for essay exams

In March, a workshop on Writing Assessment rubrics was offered, but because of poor advertising and its proximity to Spring Break, no one attended. The workshop was rescheduled for early April, at which time 6 faculty participated in the discussion.

In addition to these workshops, the CWE director has engaged individual faculty in WAC/WID discussions, addressing plagiarism and poor writing quality by assisting faculty in the College of Business as they developed assignments and presentations to combat these problems. Other colleagues who integrate writing in their upper level courses have also expressed an intent to more fully integrate UWC services, to add in-class workshops, and to more actively develop the writing component of their courses.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Two programs in the CWE Community Outreach component are in development stages: participation in the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library's inaugural One Book Program, and the creation of a writing center at Florence High School. Both provide unique opportunities to build town-gown relations.

The CWE will be participating in Florence-Lauderdale Public Library's inaugural One Book Program, which will take place from August 23rd through October 10th. Community members are encouraged to read this year's book, John Grogan's *Marley & Me,* and participate in e(r) -1 (t) -1 62 (-1 (i) 0100000(i) -1 -2 (a) 0.120003

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