Letter from the MSU Writing Center Director

We are excited to share with you the Spring 2018 Writing Center Session Notes! Our biannual newsletter is put together by our Writing Center interns and tutors. Thank you to Sam Klusmeyer, Writing Center Outreach Intern, for making this edition a reality.

In the following pages, we describe for you how our thinking about participatory hospitality has shaped both our tutor education, and the research that we are doing. Participatory hospitality – a concept coined by Writing Center scholar Michele Eodice – has anchored our thinking about our work this year. In essence, practicing participatory hospitality means that we invite our writers to be active participants in the writing and learning process with us. As Eodice describes, in participatory hospitality, both tutors and writers “have a role in helping to create and sustain the hospitality of the space.”

You will also find our inaugural column “Where Are They Now?” Our tutor alumni base is growing. We’ve decided to help everyone keep in touch by sharing the stories of what our tutors take from the Writing Center into their post-MSU lives.

And finally, we have included our call for proposals for the Integrating Writing into STEM grant program. We know the importance of students’ developing as thinkers and writers. We also know the Writing Center alone cannot create the writing experiences necessary for students to develop those skills. Through a generous donation, the Writing Center will offer up to five grants to STEM faculty to support the integration of writing experiences into their curriculum. We hope that these grants will provide the support necessary for faculty to join with us in creating a thriving culture of writing across MSU.

We welcome you into our community. Writing happens here.

Michelle Miley
MSU Writing Center Director

Shut Up and WRITE!

Wednesday, April 4
5:00 pm-7:00 pm Wilson 1-114
All are welcome to come write with us! Snacks will be provided.
Every Friday afternoon after the Writing Center closes, our 22 peer tutors stay on in Wilson Hall to participate in an hour (or more) of tutor education. We spend this Friday time examining and reflecting on particular experiences, discussing articles by scholars in the field of writing center studies, engaging in small-group inquiry projects, and sometimes even writing together. Our aim is to deepen and expand our understandings of the writers and writing that come through our doors and to explore new ways to support those writers and their writing.

This semester, we’ve been asking how language shapes society, experiences, and people; what truly reciprocal relationships look like; what makes spaces safe and/or brave; how genres operate as institutional structures; and what it means to enact a commitment to access for all. The work has been challenging, stimulating, and productive. Each week, our dedicated community of tutors demonstrates what a vibrant community of learners looks like and what it can accomplish.

Do you know students who would thrive in our tutor community? Undergraduate and graduate students of all disciplines and backgrounds are encouraged to apply. Applications for fall tutor positions are due Friday, April 13, 2018. For more information, go to www.montana.edu/writingcenter/employment.html.

Support for Graduate Writers

Yes, we work with graduate students! We have several models of support:
- One-on-one tutoring, online and face-to-face
- Interdisciplinary writing groups
- Focus Fridays (open writing time, 2nd Friday of each month)
- Specialized support for multilingual students
- Workshops and partnerships, by request

What’s New in Tutor Education

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What We’re Researching

Michelle Miley

At a writing center conference last year, I attended a workshop challenging participants to think about how our research speaks to our students’ goals for learning rather than just our own or our institutions’ goals. It got me thinking: since students materially “do” the work of academic writing, how do these students understand that work? This year, tutors Adrienne Geraci and Graeme Greenwood joined me to reasearch what students’ perceptions of academic writing are, and what support they have received or would like to receive. Our research has been funded through a Scholarship and Creativity Grant, a Faculty Excellence Grant, and a research grant from the International Writing Centers Association. We’ll keep you updated on the results!

In addition, recent graduate and tutor Liz Kovalchuk, Electrical Engineering professor Todd Kaiser, and I have had a paper accepted for presentation at the Academy Society of Engineering Education. Liz will present our paper, “Improving the Teaching and Learning of Writing through the Writing Studio Model.” She will also present the research she completed as an Undergraduate Scholar (Bill Schell, mentor): “Writing as a Method to Build Better Engineers: Examining Faculty Perceptions of Writing’s Importance.” Good luck, Liz – on the presentation and in your new job as an Industrial Engineer for NAVSEA and the Naval Acquisition and Development Program (NADP)!

Spring Partners

We are proud to be working with the following courses/programs this spring:

- ANTY 428, Anthropological Theory
- ARCH 575, Professional Paper
- CLS 101 & 201, Knowledge & Community
- COMX 106, Communication in a Dynamic Workplace
- EDU 101, Teaching and Learning Seminar
- GPHY 484, Applied GIS & Spatial Analysis
- The Graduate School
- Health Professions Advising
- PSYX 499R, Senior Thesis/Capstone
- USP 191, First-Year Research Experience Seminar
- STAT 510, Statistical Consulting Seminar
- Study Abroad Office
- WRIT 101, College Writing I

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Students of Achievement promote inclusion and equality, demonstrate strong leadership skills, and serve as exemplary role models for their peers.

Congratulations, Destiny!

Destiny Brugman, a Writing Center tutor, has been selected as one of the 2018 Women’s Center’s Students of Achievement.

Students of Achievement promote inclusion and equality, demonstrate strong leadership skills, and serve as exemplary role models for their peers.

Congratulations, Destiny!
Where Are They Now?
This is the first in a series of columns about what tutors take from the Writing Center into their professional lives.
Jenna Rhoads ’17

Jenna Rhoads, a Writing Center tutor from April 2016 to May 2017, graduated last spring with a BA in Political Science. Jenna now works for U.S. Senator Jon Tester as a Field Representative/ Caseworker. We recently caught up with Jenna and asked her how she uses her Writing Center experience in her professional life.

Q: How do you normally use writing in your work for Senator Tester?

Jenna: As I learned when I was a student and tutor, writing is a conversation. Most of my writing takes place when I communicate with agencies. This is a large part of my role as a caseworker, as Tester’s Bozeman Office often helps constituents who are having problems with a federal agency. This usually means sending an email, letter, or fax on behalf of the constituent. An important aspect here is that we must understand what the problem is – based on what the constituent has told us – and create a summary about the problem relying on that conversation. It goes the other way as well with relaying what the agency has told us back to the constituent. This also means doing a lot of active listening during conversations with a constituent, such as “what I’m understanding is xyz,” which helps to clarify the situation. I often used this type of feedback as a tutor. When a student said, “I’m worried about flow;” I would say, “Oh, so maybe you’d like to work on transitions and organization?”

Q: Now that you’ve left the Writing Center, how do you find yourself using the interpersonal skills that you gained during your work as a tutor?

Jenna: While I always considered myself to have strong interpersonal skills, being a tutor at the Writing Center helped me build upon that understanding and ability. Specifically, there are a few skills that I built at the Writing Center that really matter the most during my everyday tasks — verbal communication and listening skills, problem-solving, and relationship management. It’s critical to be able to listen to the constituent about their situation; they know what steps will come next and how we are going to proceed. That’s really where the verbal communication comes in.

At the Writing Center, there was a focus on building and maintaining relationships with students through finding a commonality between myself and that student in order to build a foundation that trust can grow from. I learned that it’s important to continue to manage and continue growing the connections made with any student/tutor/constituent that you interact with. Because of this, the most obvious connection between my Writing Center experience and my role at Tester’s office is that we are expected to build and maintain relationships with our community.

Q: What was the most valuable thing you learned during your time as a tutor?

Jenna: Two key ideas. First, how to ask more questions about someone else’s concerns or situation. This has translated a lot into my personal and professional life, and I feel more comfortable asking questions. Second, being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable and willing to take on a challenge. I actually started at the Writing Center as a writing group facilitator for the Hilleman Scholars Summer Success Academy. I had virtually zero experience tutoring when I began helping the writing groups. It was a dynamic and challenging learning experience, and I became more comfortable with learning through trial by fire – which really came in handy when I graduated and started working full-time. (Eds. Note: The Hilleman Academy is a month-long program, pre-fall-semester, that prepares recipients of the Hilleman Scholarship for college-level classes. The Writing Center has partnered with the Hilleman Program since its start in 2016.)

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Call for Proposals: Integrating Writing into STEM Courses
The MSU Writing Center

The MSU Writing Center and Department of English, with funding from a private donor, welcome proposals for the Integrating Writing into STEM Teaching Grants Program, 2018-2019. Grants of $5000 each will be awarded to up to five STEM faculty willing to integrate writing into their 200-400 level STEM courses. These must be major courses. The deadline for proposal submission is April 30, 2018 at 5:00 pm.

These grants are available to tenure track and non-tenure track STEM faculty employed at Montana State University Bozeman. The grants will provide faculty funding for curriculum development that integrates writing and Writing Center support into their 200-, 300-, and 400-level STEM course designs. Although faculty teaching 400-level courses will be considered, capstone classes are excluded from this grant opportunity. 200-level Core courses are also excluded. The Integrating Writing into STEM Teaching Grants provide incentive to those faculty members willing to invest the time to integrate writing effectively into their course designs. The grant comes with the expectation that the recipients are willing to collaborate with the Writing Center and to engage in the time it takes to learn along with those in the Writing Center how to better integrate/teach writing in STEM courses.

Grant awards will provide funding for faculty to create and adopt new and innovative assignments and teaching methodologies incorporating writing into 200 – 400 level STEM classes. Recipients will collaborate with the Writing Center and other participating faculty to develop best practices in writing and to support students’ writing processes through selected Writing Center models. (Those proposing courses for Fall 2018 should expect to consult with the Writing Center during Summer 2018.)

Faculty Voices

We asked several MSU professors how they use writing in their daily lives. Here’s what they said...

“Almost every year I’m trying to get my research published in peer reviewed journals like The Condor or The Journal of Wildlife Management or the Wilson Bulletin. You’re taking your secondary level [technical] reports and you’re distilling them into a succinct manuscript that maybe will get accepted by a journal.”

David Willey, Department of Ecology

“The better question might be, “How do I not use what I know about writing in my daily life?” Obviously, there’s a great deal of overlap between thinking, speaking, writing, and reading, where everything I know about writing therefore also applies to thinking and speaking and reading. And I spend just about every day of my life highly engaged in those acts, where the better I am at each, the better I am at all.”

Benjamin Leubner, Assistant Professor of English