

Michigan Writing Centers Association Newsletter

College Writing Center Gives Back to Community



By Gerald Browning
Coordinator, Baker University-Flint
Writing Center

The Baker College of Flint’s (BC-Flint) Learning Support Services has conducted a Summer Institute Program for local students within the Flint/Genesee County area. During the July – August months, students from 6th grade to 12th grade, come to the Summer Institute to take classes devoted to Reading, Writing, Math, and Computers. The BC-Flint’s Writing Center (a branch of Learning Support Services) was in charge of the reading and writing components of the Summer Institute.

The Writing Center staff has been in charge of coming up with a curriculum for the students to use to strengthen their reading and writing skills. We used a multitude of media

to get the students to interact with readings and other ideas to foster self-expression. In the previous year we have used texts such as Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* to create an environment for students to discuss topical issues for children such as parental control, the importance of rules, and positive and negative role models.

Unfortunately, the readings did not do very well for the students. They lost interest in the readings quickly, but the in-class discussions and exercises that complemented them went along very well.

The students love the kinesthetic learning approaches we have used. They drew sample covers for the books, they gave small presentations on the ideas represented in the books, and they asked many questions regarding the stories.

This year, we created a curriculum designed around multimedia. The students read short stories, rather than a novel. One of the stories, titled “The Bully,” was adapted into a short film. After they read the story, the students watched the film and wrote a reaction paper to both. Afterwards, they discussed their feelings towards the story. Each student expressed personal history of bullies.

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The writing assignments were taken from newspapers, magazines, and news-related websites as well as the short story collection that was created by the Writing Center staff. The students seemed to focus more intently on the short stories and the multimedia assignments (i.e. film, websites, and news sites) than in the previous Summer Institute Program.

The Math session of the program, under the tutelage of DaRon Hairston and other Work Study tutors (students currently attending Baker College); the students worked on math problems that would help them with their studies in the fall (not to mention those seniors who would be moving to college relatively soon). The students and Work Study students worked closely together. A strong portion of the Work Study students helping the community students were Education students.

This past year introduced the Computer session of the Summer Institute. Under the direction of Omar Young, the students were able to put together a PowerPoint presentation chronicling their time at Baker College. At the end of the program, they pre-

sented their PowerPoint slides to their parents, family, and friends.

Once a student completes the Summer Institute Program, they are allowed to use the tutoring services of the Learning Support Services for the entire academic year. Many parents like the idea of getting help from college students and professional tutors for their child/children. This gives them a link to the college atmosphere. This is quite important for the development of a student since it allows them to see where they can be in a few years.

Many students have expressed interest in attending Baker College. One of our Summer Institute students graduated this past summer and currently attends Baker College.

Reaching out to the community has always been a motto for the Baker College of Flint Learning Support Services. We have employed several Work Study tutors who work "on site" at community high schools and elementary schools, where they conduct tutoring sessions in Math, Sciences, and English. This program continues with that tradition.

Grand Valley State tutors reflect on fall MWCA Bright Ideas Conference

I'd like to share with you all a snippet of my experience at the Michigan Writing Centers Association Conference a couple of weeks ago.

This was my first conference, and actually, it wasn't scary at all. Every session offered was another option toward improving ourselves and our centers. The session I found most enjoyable, however, featured an in-depth look at Professional Development. Its focus: Discovering how consultants can take advantage of the wonders of professional development as they balance a larger commitment: life.

Finding breathing hard at times, I often struggle with the thought of completing at least one professional goal before I graduate. This roundtable session made me realize that I was not fighting alone. Through discussion with other consultants, we discovered that professional development is a fluid process that should be incorporated into every work day instead of into one specific project. I agreed with this solely because I have learned and continue to learn so much through simply interaction with 'consultees.' For instance, this is my first semester working with a scheduled ESL student. Through helping her, I have strengthened my own grammar and semantics. Most importantly, I learned that I actually can explain the difference between 'much' and 'many,' etc.

Overall, we never came to a definite resolution as to how to incorporate professional development into our busy lives. Perhaps, this could be a topic of interest for some of you. I am unsure whether the consultants from U of M Flint will take this topic to ECWCA, however, I'd be interested in learning more.

—Kim

I extremely enjoyed the conference in all aspects. Whether I gained knowledge, or simply solidified it, it was a great experience to be had.

What I would say impacted me the most, and what I was able to walk away with was the idea of making writing centers more accessible to other forms of writing other than the standard freshman level writing courses. I feel our writing center does a great job, as proven by the subject variety we see on a daily basis.



One thing that is almost never seen, however, is the creative writer. Whether it be for a class, or simply for the art of writing, I have only dealt with one creative writing student, and this person had only come in for grammar, and that is all. In fact, it was insisted that was all I look at; no content, no organization, no transitions, no gross to close!

Just grammar. I sense there is a big misconception on what our center can provide for creative writers, and therefore, addressing these matters can benefit us.

With that thought in mind, fellow staff members and I have brainstormed ways to appeal more to the creative writing student, which branched into making the writing center 'more inviting' all together. We came up with things as simple as moving the welcome board to where it could more easily be

seen at the front of the center, to things more complicated like reorganizing our handouts so that they will be more accessible to writers.

—Colleen Barth

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GVSU, *continued from page 3*

Attending the MWCA conference allowed me to share about the Outreach program at the Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors as well as learn about other volunteer programs that writing centers across Michigan are involved in. This conference allowed me to tell other writing centers about the volunteer program at our center as well as share some advice on the planning, pitfalls, and ways to meet the goals of both the center and those being helped through our three year experience of running our volunteer program. Through our program, consultants volunteer at a local area alternative high school and work with 11th and 12th graders on their writing assignments. Through our three years, we have modified and accommodated our program to help both parties involved such as the number of consultants sent, frequency of visits, and what areas to focus on in the writing of high school students.

Through my session, I learned of similar programs that writing centers were trying or wanting to start up. One center had an annual visit to a local area high school; another was hoping to start a volunteer program in an urban middle school. I think that working with adolescents on writing can open doors for them in school and the world around them. By focusing on these kids early, writing centers can show the impact that writing can have in one's life and the world around them.

Another amazing volunteer program I learned about at the MWCA conference was through Saginaw Valley State University. Their writing center volunteers at an area hospice to work with patients to create written heirlooms through their program, Living through Literacy. Their program works with those at the end-stages of life. It was moving to see the importance of life when many may not see writing as create such unique and meaningful pieces of important for writing centers to look beyond the university to find areas that it can be helpful outside our scope such as young people and the helping these populations makes our work more

—*Julie L. Lenhart*

I attended U-M Flint's session on utilizing cyber-technologies in the writing center to 098-level student writers to engage in writing demographic community. The presenters emphasized that underclassmen have with such technology use for social purposes, and it was the presenters' comfort with such technology would comfortable with college-level writing assignments.

It didn't. One session participant summarized their presentation for them in much the same way as I do here: it was a failed experiment.

It seemed that U-M Flint was surprised by this summary. Their goal, I noted bravely in one of the final comments of the session, was to "make students comfortable" with college-level writing, but our goal as writing centers is to improve student writing. I didn't mean to fluster them (and they were flustered) nor embarrass them (and they were embarrassed), so I moved on to ask, how can we use this technology to improve student writing? I suggested that we return to the presenters' original idea of "building the academy": writing as a means both to clarify one's thoughts and position and also to engage other scholar-writers to discuss and build ideas and knowledge.

I'm sure I didn't speak so eloquently. I may have mumbled. But I don't think so.



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See GVSU, page 5

By Frances E. FitzGerald
Writing Center Coordinator
Madonna University

Orange and black balloons and crepe-paper streamers, cardboard skeletons and pumpkins, and oily pizza boxes littered Madonna University's Take 5 Lounge from noon Friday, October 31, to noon Saturday, November 1. The event was the first 24-hour Halloween Write-a-Thon, hosted by the Madonna Writing Center and the Madonna Pen, the campus writing group.

The purpose was twofold: to emphasize the process and social interaction aspects of writing, and to have some fun. Peer tutors, ESL tutors, and the Writing Center coordinator volunteered their time to help students with class assignments or personal projects. Students brought their laptops, and the Writing Center provided pads of paper, pens, and prompts, as well as candy and coffee.

Madonna graduate and AmeriCorp representative Nick Modelski got the campus radio station involved. He and other radio talent, including Jake Freeman and Mike O'Connor, played an array of musical genres and invited listeners to join the Write-a-Thon. At around 4 a.m., punchy participants told on-air Halloween-themed stories, each building on the last one's contribution. Geneva Maxie-Austin provided eerie sound effects. What the stories lacked in coherence, they made up for in sheer giddiness.

Linda Hoyer, professor of children's literature, speech, and acting, performed a dramatic reading of "Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allan Poe. Student Rachel Adler read an excerpt from her gothic novel-in-progress.

Dismembered rubber fingers, bloody handprints, over-sized sunglasses, and fake noses were among the prizes offered. TESOL graduate student, Writing Center tutor, and key Write-a-Thon planner Qolette Jackson—with help from senior tutor Jeri Dolch—put several random cut-out words on a tray. Once an hour or so, one of the students would pull a word, such as "election," "moon," or "Toto," from the pile. Whoever had written that word, or had written it most often, won one of these coveted prizes.

Edna Rankine of Student Services provided lemonade, fruit, and other goodies for Write-a-Thon participants. Tutors went out on two pizza runs to keep the writers well-fueled.

"It was a really relaxed environment. Students were more motivated to try something creative," said Jackson.



Tutor Niketa Woodley (r.) works with a Write-a-Thon participant at MU's 24-hour event.

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At the Michelle and Heather Show, we presented the historical and cultural bases of plagiarism and what we at GVSU are working up to address plagiarism issues with our ESL students. (I think Michelle has enacted her plan by the time of this writing.) Theory and praxis walking hand in hand, that's Michelle and I for you. I love big words, especially those with few letters. Anyway, we held our audience of 8-12 in rapt attention and had a stimulating discourse.

I was pleased that we didn't have 30 people in the room, but we did have the cream of the crop. People were plagiarized-out by the time our presentation was scheduled, as there were two other plagiarism workshops ("how to commit plagiarism"?), but footing our understanding of plagiarism in a cultural and historical context seemed to be beneficial and intellectually stimulating for our audience. The gist of the discussion was, "now that we understand our own Western conceptualization of plagiarism vis-a-vis other cultures' understandings of the ownership of knowledge, how can we move ahead as writing centers to tackle this mounting concern?" I foresee future work to be done in this area.

—Heather Gemmen

Oakland U Writing Center staff present at MWCA

*By Pamela Mitzelfeld,
Associate Director
Oakland University Writing Center*

As the new Associate Director of the Oakland University Writing Center, I can testify to the fact that we are not a “sleepy little corner of the library.” Fall has been an especially productive time for us; in addition to serving as many as 48 clients a day, our consultants have attended conferences, visited classrooms, offered workshops, and hosted a lively discussion on our blog. Our ranks are expanding, too; we welcomed three new tutors, two of whom are graduate students, two new receptionists, and me. The staff has been tremendously patient with me as I learn the duties and responsibilities of my new position.

During the October MWCA Bright Ideas Conference, my first foray into the greater writing center community, I had the opportunity to observe our consultants—Genevieve Taylor, Rebecca Tomczak, and Ashley Treadwell—facilitate “Two Different Pages, One Assignment: Cultural Awareness, Communication, and Coping Strategies for Tutors of ESL Students.” Their insights into “cultural tendencies, unique ways of speaking, and unfamiliar world views” provided attendees with practical tools and advice for effectively tutoring their ESL students. I was quite impressed by their interaction with the audience as they expertly fielded questions and engaged participants in a group exercise.

The idea for the presentation first emerged on our blog, where Rebecca penned a query about productive approaches. I think the role of the blog is significant because Sherry and I had offered the blog as an effective means of extended conversation and an alternative to numerous real-time meetings. We have been greatly rewarded for our willingness to acknowledge our students’ busy schedules, and I would strongly the use of a blog to cut down on meetings and to facilitate professional exchange.

Our director, Sherry Wynn Perdue, gave a presentation entitled “Beyond Altruism: Writing Center Partnerships as Public Relations and Client Service.” Her talk focused on the importance of increasing writing center visibility on campus and suggested ways in which directors and consultants might work collaboratively with “non-humanities disciplines and find a voice in scholarship both within and outside of writing center publications.” She has deemed 2008-2009 the year of partnerships, and we are well on our way to collaborating with other units and to extending the writing center’s purview.

The MWCA Conference was an excellent experience, and I enjoyed networking with staff members from other writing centers and learning about some of the programs, events, and procedures that have been successful for them. All of us at the OUWC were thrilled to learn that we will have the honor of hosting next year’s MWCA Conference, and we hope to provide the same outstanding conference experience that Ann Russell and her team at Madonna University provided this year.

I am looking forward to next year’s conference and all the exciting events and developments here at the Oakland University Writing Center.

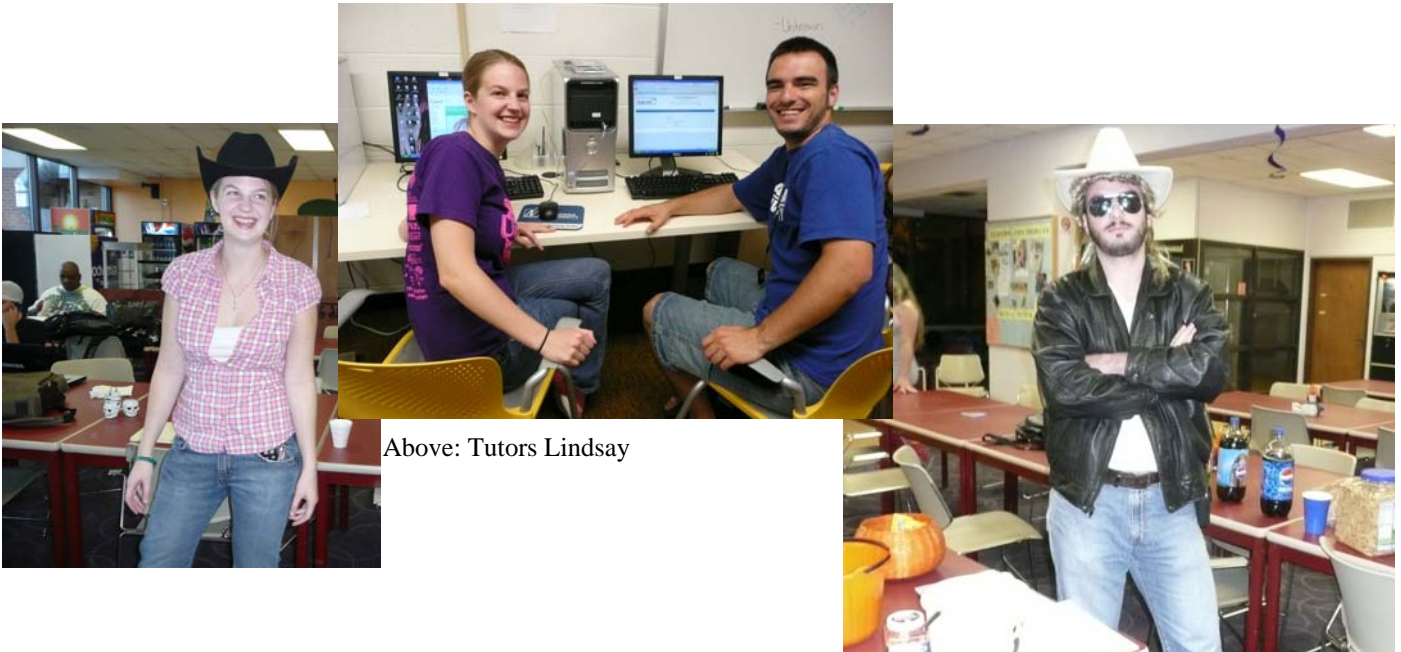


Student Dennis Lin appreciated the tutors' help. "I loved the Write-a-Thon. The people there were nice and warm-hearted. They were insightful and helped me with my reading comprehension and writing skills."

"I really enjoyed it and look forward to the next event," said student Brian Robinson. "It was very entertaining and different, and I enjoyed meeting the other writers."

Writing Center tutor and student John Allasio wrote, "The 24-hour Write-a-Thon was a great way to meet and network with other writers. It was a really enjoyable way to juxtapose work and fun while illustrating the concept of writing as a discursive process. The fun, casual (and eventually slap-stick) atmosphere was a great setting for honing one's writing skills."

An educational experience, the Write-a-Thon taught some of us that pulling an all-nighter isn't what it used to be. Future Write-a-Thons—possibly a Research/Write-a-Thon in tandem with the Madonna library personnel—may last only 12 hours. But now we know the keys to Write-a-Thon success: writers, pizza, Dollar-Store prizes, music, and a hefty dose of fun.



It is October. You can tell by the leaves people track into the center. We have a number of silver maples on campus and the leaves are dragged in wet on students' soles to dry while they write and fall off beneath the tables. It is nearly Halloween and everyone is afraid of the end of the term. It is going to be a lot of work for everybody, graders and students alike. The end of the term always dresses in a series of costumes that begin with jack-o-lantern, progresses through Tom Turkey and ends up in some semblance of Frosty the Snowman. Each of these guises is one of the manifestations of a holiday deity, morphology of the end of an academic year, an advent of personae that herald a welcome winter break. The leaves are but the first tincture of pumpkin color that will coalesce into a full visage with black, isosceles eyes. The second institution of orange turns up in the candy dish in the dean's office, as candy corn which will persist there until the secretary packs up her belongings after the December party and slogs through snow to the parking ramp. This constitutes the orange distribution curve of autumn at this latitude. The curve mirrors the attempt to assess a multitude of student papers.

*Scott Russell
Coordinator,
Marian E. Wright Writing Center
University of Michigan-Flint*



Madonna

welcomed us with open arms,
hearts, pencils, pens & paper. We were

kept warm inside her walls, her endless
corridors, portraits guiding our way,

pausing us in thought & reflection. We were
taught that day, pedagogy coated in laughter,

drawings of metaphor, the ship with portholes
& taxi cabs, another example of synthesis.

We tried to invent, suggest new ways to break
through to writers, get them to jump with us,

trust that we'd catch them, guide them through
lightless nights & show them that creativity is

as simple as taking the chance to begin.

—*Glenn Taylor
Central Michigan University*

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ference reviews as Word docu-
ments to arussell@madonna.edu. Please send photos as
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