

The University of Montana Writing Center Assessment Report



Academic Year 2016-2017



Communities of Practice

The University of Montana Writing Center promotes student, faculty, and staff engagement through a reflective, data-driven approach to meaningful teaching and learning.

We create communities of practice in which students, faculty, and staff collaborate to become more versatile and effective thinkers, communicators, and readers.



www.umt.edu/

writingcenter

243.2266

Visit Early. Visit Often.



Shuai Yuan, UM graduate student, and Tom Bateridge, Writing Center tutor, say farewell as Shuai prepares to celebrate his 2017 graduation.



Leah Haemin Kim, UM alumna, presents "Hands," a representation of UM students, faculty, and staff as they think and communicate through writing.

UMWC Objectives

Improve students' communication behaviors

Improve the quality of students' work

Positively influence faculty teaching practices across the curriculum

Foster writing across the curriculum

Contribute to improved student retention rates and overall GPA

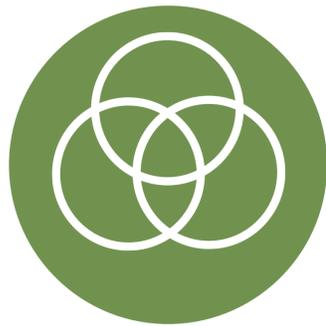
UMWC Assessment Tools

- ✓ Student data tracking
- ✓ Focus Groups
- ✓ Faculty and Student Surveys
- ✓ Observation and Reflection
- ✓ Pre- and Post-performance Assessments

Assessed Programs, Academic Year 2016-2017



**Engaged Students:
Tutoring**



**Engaged Classrooms:
The Sidecar Project**



**Engaged Graduate
Students:
Graduate Writing
Programs**



**Engaged Faculty:
Writing Across the
Curriculum**



"The Writing Center has been incredibly important to my success. Working with various tutors on my papers and presentations has made me work harder than I ever have as a student."

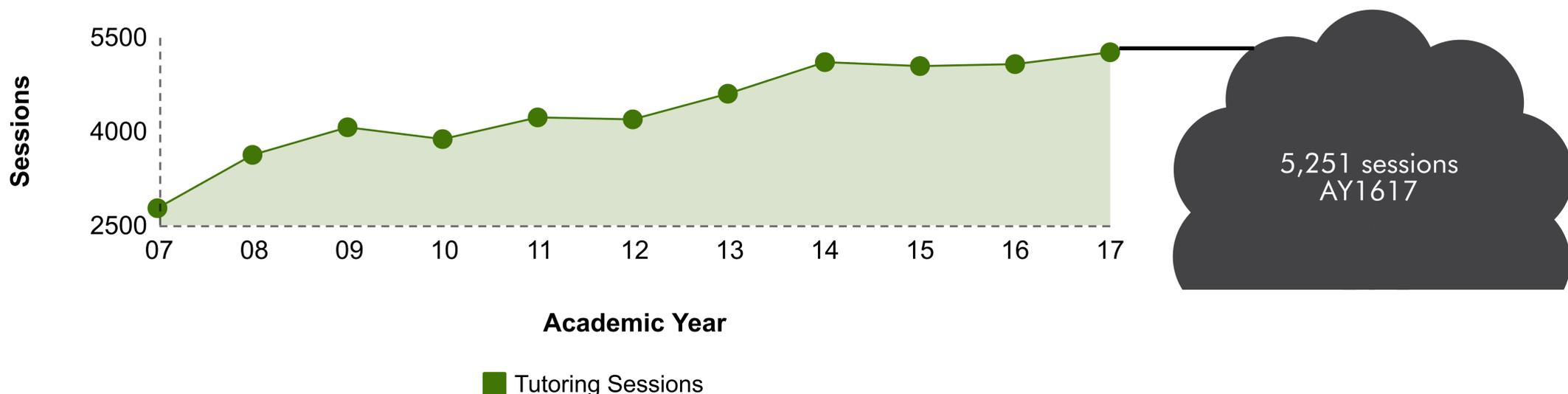
-Undergraduate Student

Engaged Students: Tutoring



Undergraduate and graduate student demand for Writing Center consultations continues to grow. Students from 125 academic areas used the Writing Center during the past academic year, a reflection of UM students' deep engagement with course content, research, and communication practices. In We not only help students produce better products but also support their development as more effective thinkers and communicators.

UMWC Writing Consultations by Academic Year



Highlighted Findings: Tutoring

Student Behaviors and Attitudes

Of Writing Center users surveyed:

- ✓ 97% felt motivated to write after a session
- ✓ 94% felt challenged to think more deeply about course content
- ✓ 97% used sessions to better address professors' expectations

Student Performance

As a result of tutoring sessions, students most commonly:

- ✓ Revised to better address the assigned task
- ✓ Revised to write more analytically
- ✓ Made major organizational changes to better demonstrate logic
- ✓ Made sentence- and word-level changes

91%

growth in student demand since 2007

59,874 UMWC writing consultations since 2002

Opportunities: Tutoring

Assessment Findings

328 waitlisted students were unable to schedule an appointment due to student demand that exceeded capacity.

Students are more likely to transfer strategies and knowledge learned during sessions if tutors describe the "why" behind the strategies taught.

Students are more likely to transfer strategies and knowledge learned during sessions if prompted to consider other applicable contexts.

17% of surveyed students are uncomfortable showing their writing to others while 78% revise their work two or more times.

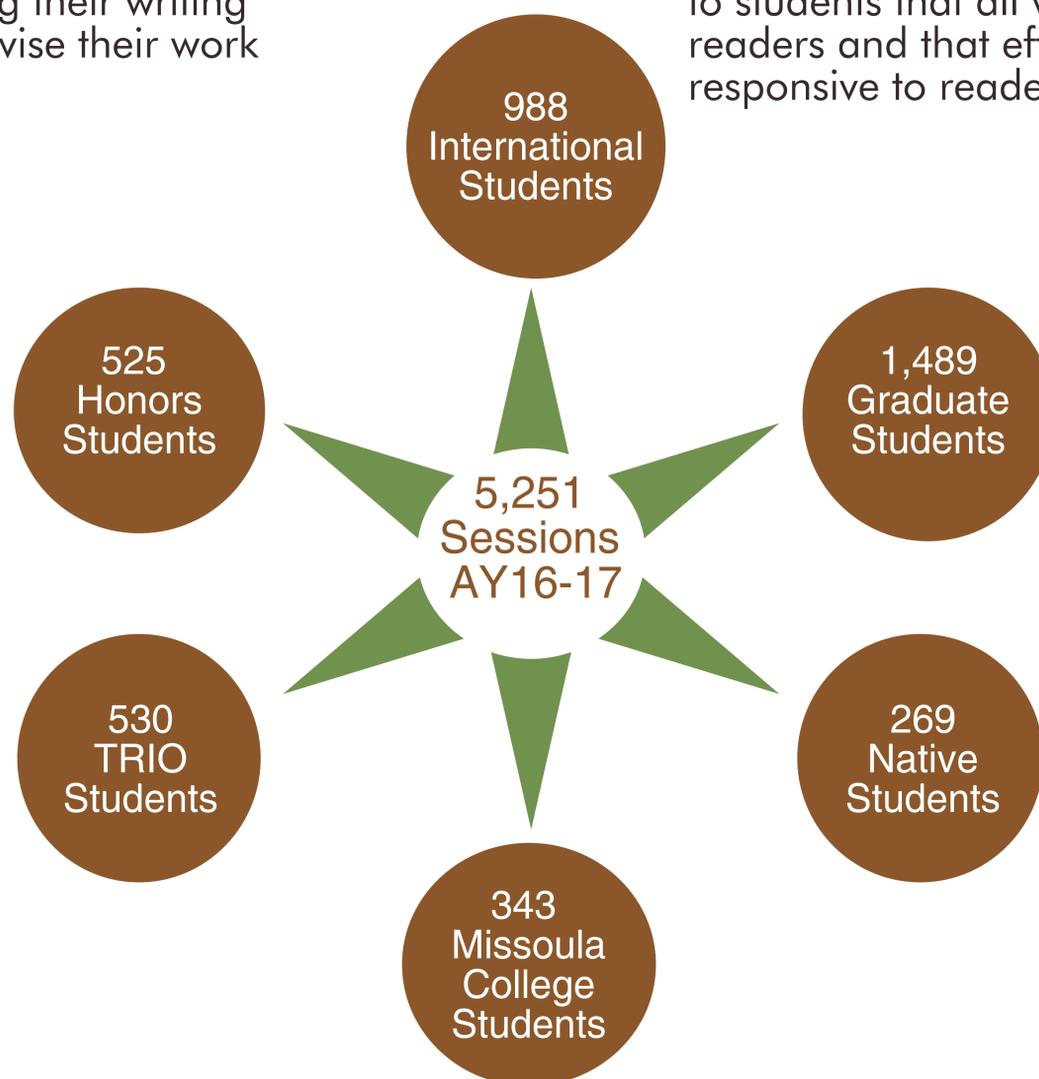
Planned Actions in Response

Seek additional sources of funding to support additional hours. Offer as many appointments as possible during high demand times.

Promote tutor education focused on the concept of transfer and on strategies that facilitate transfer.

Create a post-session questionnaire to prompt students to consider how learned strategies may apply to new contexts.

Prompt faculty to send the message to students that all writers need readers and that effective revision is responsive to reader feedback.



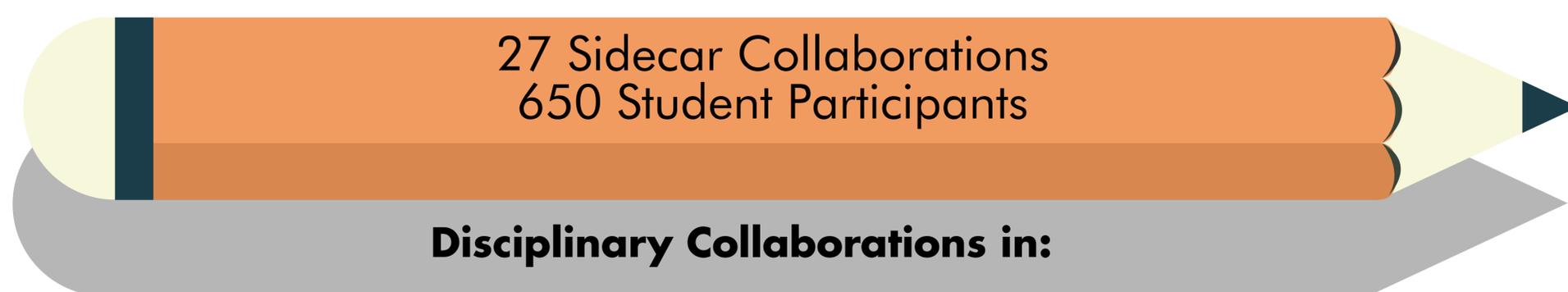
"The Writing Center is my favorite resource at UM. I've used the Writing Center for three years because the tutors challenge me to improve my work in all my classes."

-Undergraduate Student

Engaged Classrooms: The Sidecar Project



The Sidecar Project is a course-embedded tutoring model that produces a trifecta of positive influence: improved student writing practices, changed faculty teaching practices, and expanded tutor knowledge. In each Sidecar collaboration, students, faculty, and tutors join a community of practice in which all participants think critically, learn new strategies, and develop new communication behaviors.



African American Studies
Art
Biology
Business Management
Chemistry
CSD

Communication Studies
Counselor Education
Economics
Education
Geography
History

Law
MCLL
Pharmacy
Political Science
Social Work
Sociology
Writing

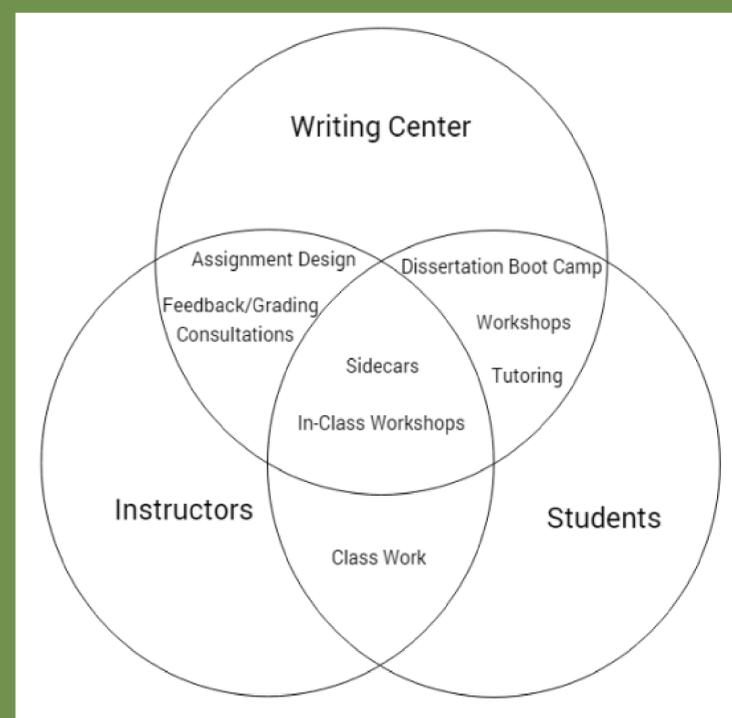
Highlighted Findings: The Sidecar Project

Student Behaviors, Attitudes, and Perceptions

- ✓ 96% received more feedback on their writing than in other courses that require writing
- ✓ 95% revised more frequently than when writing for other courses
- ✓ 62% felt pushed to think more deeply about course content

Faculty Behaviors, Attitudes, and Perceptions

- ✓ 65% assigned more writing as a result of the Sidecar collaboration
- ✓ 100% report the Sidecar collaboration motivated them to rethink their writing assignments
- ✓ 100% report Sidecar students more successfully met expectations
- ✓ 100% will make changes to future courses based on the Sidecar experience



Communities of Practice

Opportunities: The Sidecar Project

Assessment Findings

56% of Sidecar students better understood the professors' expectations.

Mid-semester adjustments in instruction could have addressed students' specific writing challenges.

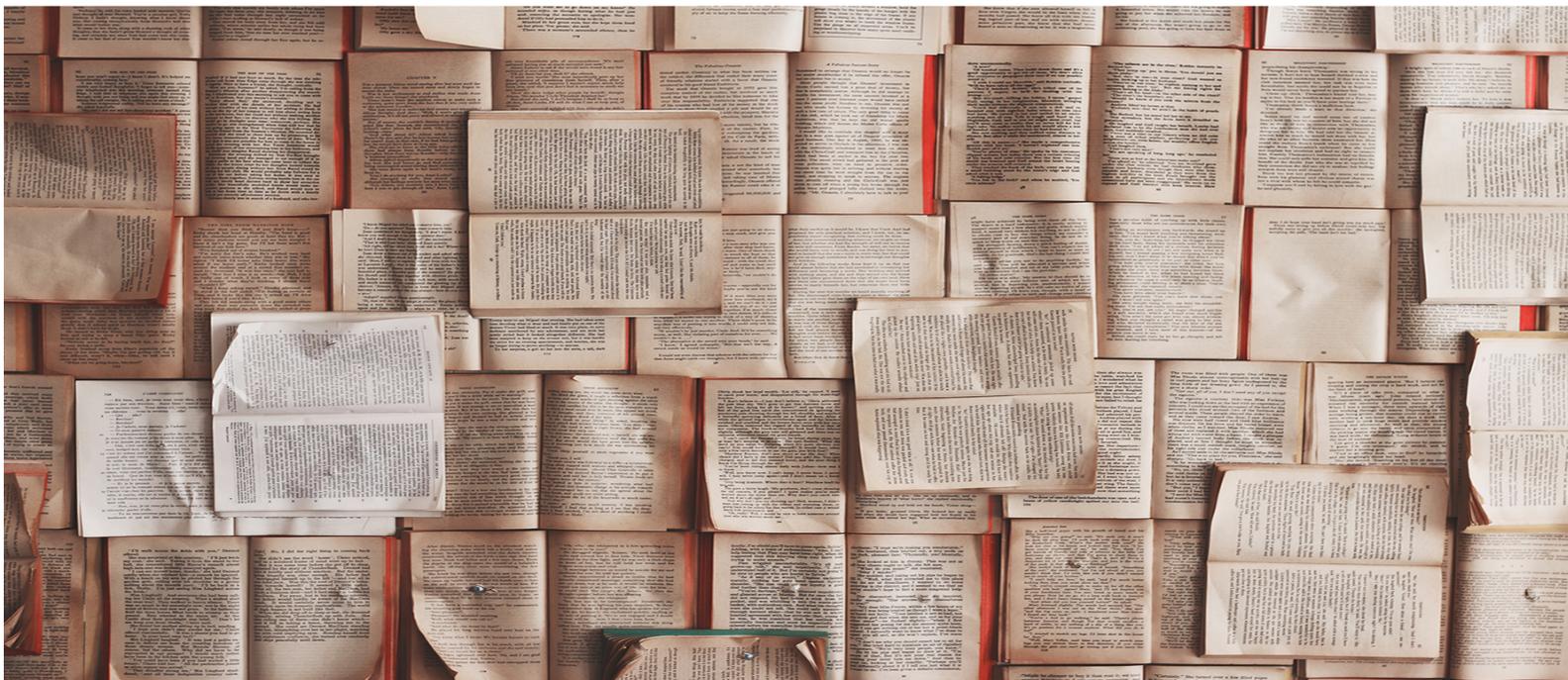
Professors' specific revision requirements influence the extent to which students revise. Students make more substantive revisions in response to parameters that set them up to make major changes.

Planned Actions in Response

Develop Sidecar instruction strategies around assignment interpretation.

Perform a mid-semester pre- and post-draft assessment with the faculty member, and develop a set of mid-semester adjustments to better meet student needs.

Work with Sidecar faculty not only to design assignments but also to define the parameters around revision options to promote more substantive revision.



"Having to explain the writing assignments to the Sidecar tutors was a valuable experience. This made me see 'holes' in my assignment directions I had not noticed before. Sidecar also helped me to better identify the goals I wanted students to achieve with each assignment."

-Sidecar FacultyCollaborator



"As a result of Sidecar, I completely rewrote multiple times to produce more concrete, successful papers in the long run. Our sessions taught me to recognize weaknesses and strengths in my and others' writing, and it taught me to revise with more purpose."

-Sidecar Student

Engaged Graduate Students: Graduate Writing Programs



Graduate student demand for Writing Center support has increased 280% since 2011. We meet this demand not only through one-to-one consultations but also through an intensive four-day Jump Start Dissertation/Thesis Boot Camp and a Graduate Student Workshop Series. We recognize graduate students as valuable members of our research community, and we therefore commit to supporting their growth as communicators.



280% increase in graduate student demand since 2011
142 graduate student Jump Start completers

Highlighted Findings: Graduate Writing Programs

Student Benefits, Needs, and Perceptions

Graduate student Jump Start and Workshop Series participants expressed:

- ✓ desire for writing and presentation support throughout the graduate experience
- ✓ increased recognition that writing requires persistent practice, feedback, and effort
- ✓ enthusiasm for the opportunity to work with other graduate students from across disciplines
- ✓ recognition that the writing strategies learned were immediately applicable to their writing projects
- ✓ intention to continue working with the Writing Center to facilitate completion of degree

Opportunities: Graduate Writing Programs

Assessment Findings

Graduate students benefit from analyzing a variety of examples from the disciplines.

The Workshop Series sequence needs to be reorganized and refocused to meet student needs through one-off, discrete sessions.

Graduate students continue to perceive research and writing as an activity they should be able to "figure out" alone.

Graduate student demand continues to increase each semester.

Planned Actions in Response

Develop a more varied set of Jump Start and Workshop Series examples for analysis.

Use graduate student feedback to revise the Workshop Series sequence and to develop topics appropriate for one-off, discrete sessions.

Work with faculty advisors to support graduate students' collaborative learning behaviors and to send the message that even strong writers need readers and invite feedback.

Seek additional sources of funding and new partnerships to expand graduate student support.



"This program was extremely beneficial. I now have a much larger writing toolkit, and I am excited to implement specific strategies that we learned.

I especially appreciated interacting with graduate students from outside my department.... I can't believe how helpful this program was."

-Forestry Graduate Student



Engaged Classrooms: Writing Across the Curriculum



Faculty are primary partners in the Writing Center's efforts to promote student success. We support faculty through in-class and discipline-specific writing workshops, and through one-to-one faculty consultations. Our faculty collaborators help us to expand our impact across disciplines.



In-class Workshops	154
3,697 Student Participants	

Professional Development Sessions	74
192 Faculty Participants	

Highlighted Findings: Writing Across the Curriculum

Faculty Behaviors, Attitudes, and Perceptions

Of surveyed faculty:

- ✓ 87% refer students to the Writing Center
- ✓ 76% notice an improvement in their students' writing after a session
- ✓ 85% believe the Writing Center is a critical resource for student success in their courses
- ✓ 75% invite or plan to invite a Writing Center representative to conduct writing workshops in their courses



Opportunities: Writing Across the Curriculum

Assessment Findings

28% of surveyed faculty collaborate with the Writing Center to design writing assignments and to embed writing-to-learn strategies into the classroom.

32% of faculty who refer students to the Writing Center do so only when they perceive students to be struggling.

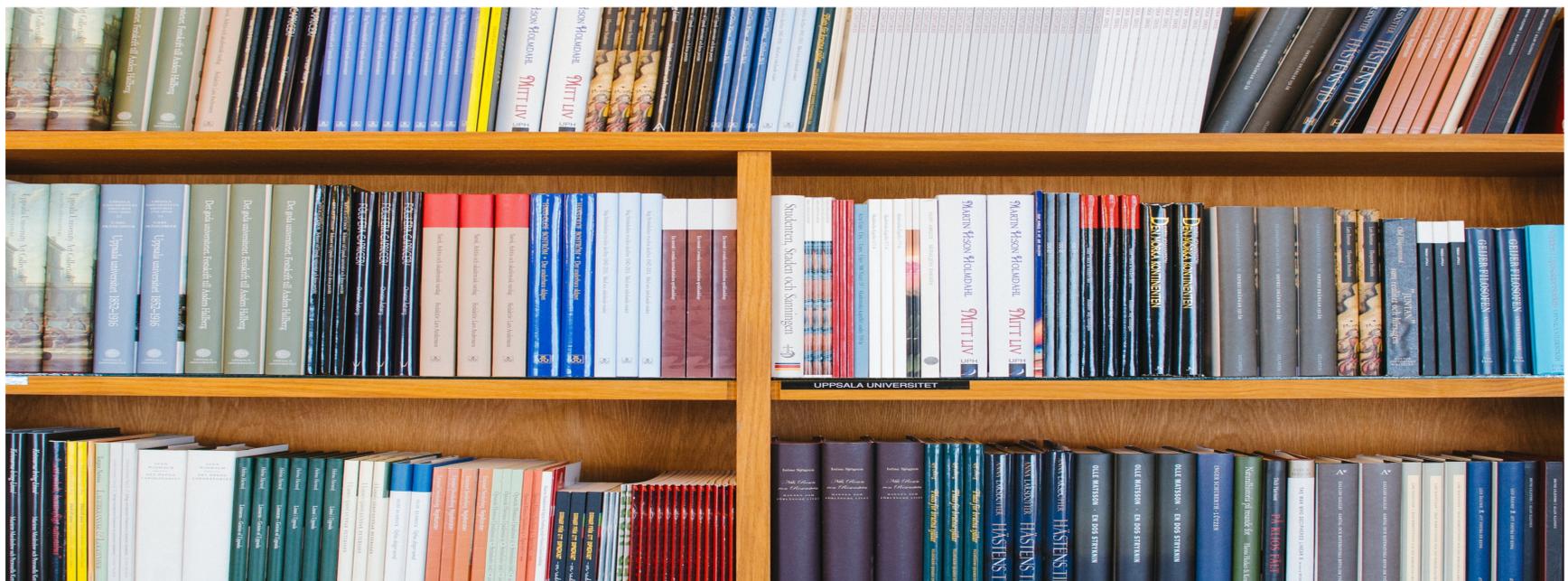
68% of surveyed faculty want additional opportunities to learn and share teaching strategies that support student writers.

Planned Actions in Response

Reach out to potential faculty collaborators to offer assistance designing assignments and implementing writing-to-learn activities.

Develop a communication plan to help faculty understand the Writing Center as a place for all writers, including high performing writers.

Partner with the Faculty Development Office, the Pedagogy Project, and the Mansfield Library to provide professional development workshops and conversations.



"At first, I thought the Writing Center's main benefit was its support for my students. Now, I understand that the Writing Center provides an equally valuable benefit - its staff support me in becoming a better teacher and writer, too."

-Economics Professor

Looking Forward: Turning Assessment into Meaningful Growth in the UMWC

The Writing Center's planned actions in each programming area will advance our five overarching objectives. We also have identified a set of additional goals for the coming academic year. These goals reflect our effort to persistently learn, improve, and adapt, all to better serve students and faculty.



Additional UMWC Goals for the 2017-2018 Academic Year

- ✓ Assess and align Writing Center programming to address the priorities outlined in Strategic Vision 1.1: Creating Change Together.
- ✓ Develop strategies to facilitate transfer of effective communication practices across contexts and over time. Educate tutors and faculty about the concept of transfer.
- ✓ Collaborate with the Communication Studies Department to house and advertise the Public Speaking Center.
- ✓ Collaborate with the Graduate School, GPSA, and ICN to expand graduate student support.
- ✓ Integrate more purposefully into the First-year Seminar curriculum.
- ✓ Develop low-cost, efficient methods to meet growing undergraduate student, graduate student, and faculty demand for Writing Center services.
- ✓ Provide incentives for professional development and retention of effective tutors.



Main Hall, 1903
Morton J. Elrod, University Photographer

Communities of Practice

The Writing Center tutors take genuine interest in my writing and believe that I am capable of doing excellent work.

I need this kind of support.

**Undergraduate Student,
Sociology**

Collaborating with the Writing Center has improved my teaching.

I'm now more careful in expressing my expectations and more thoughtful in my instruction.

**Professor,
Business Management**

**At the UMWC,
students, faculty, and staff
work together
to become
versatile and effective
communicators.**

The Writing Center is the most important resource that I use on campus.

I know many of my fellow graduate students feel the same way.

**Graduate Student,
Social Work**

