@UTA WriteOn

UTA English Writing Center Newsletter

Writing the World: Consultants Present at SCWCA

The yearly South Central Writing Centers Association (SCWCA) Conference was held from February 12th through the 14th on the campus of UT Austin this year. The theme, “What Starts Here Writes the World,” invited submissions that centered on research behind Writing Centers as hubs for social and cultural exchange along with the exchange of ideas about writing. The applicants and participants of the conference come from universities as close to home as Texas as well as other South Central regions like Oklahoma and Louisiana.

From our own Writing Center here at UTA, consultants Amanda Yanes, Matt Underwood, Jessica Story, and Jordan Robinson were all invited to come lead panels and discussions along with then-Writing Center Assistant Director Matthew Womble and Writing Center Director Tracy Clough. To provide some examples of topics presented, consultants Jordan and Jessica co-led a workshop focusing on how to best utilize the physical space of a writing center in order to establish the ideal tutoring atmosphere and Amanda led a discussion that centered around the importance of making a writing center inviting to students who need grammar help while still avoiding solely becoming a fix-it shop.

Our tutors had the opportunity to meet with and discuss methods with other writing centers from around the area and, in turn, develop their own techniques so that our Writing Center could continue to grow. The SCWCA Conference was an enlightening experience that will continue to offer growth and development among our consultants so we can continue to develop our writers here at UTA.
“Dead to Write”: Celebrating Charlaine Harris

On March 23, 2015 from 2 to 6 PM, the Writing Center hosted the “Dead to Write” event to celebrate the exciting visit of *New York Times* best-selling author Charlaine Harris. Harris, well-known for her *Sookie Stackhouse* series, which was developed into the HBO vampire drama *True Blood*, was hosted by the UTA Women’s and Gender Studies Program.

On March 24 from 7 to 9 PM on the 6th floor of the Central Library, Harris gave a lecture on topics such as futuristic females, women in science, and science fiction. The staff at the Writing Center wanted to contribute to the blood-sucking fever on campus, so we opened the doors of our Writing Studio to students and faculty. Visitors enjoyed a classic horror-themed PowerPoint—packed with the terrifying visages of Count Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon—as they ate spooky snacks and showed off their supernatural and horror-writing skills. A colorful array of posters and buckets of markers lined the tables, where students and faculty sat down to pen their creepy poems, haikus, eight-word stories, character descriptions, plot ideas, and terrifying short stories.

A handful of talented artists made an appearance as well, embellishing the posters with scary images of witches, mummies, vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, and other supernatural creatures. A couple of posters were even dedicated to horrific “short story continuations,” where writers could write their spine-chilling additions to pre-existing plots. These posters were especially popular with students, who enjoyed adding strange and alarming twists.

Featured Tutor

Jordan R., our featured tutor, has been working in the Writing Center for five semesters and will be graduating with a BA in English and minor in creative writing in December 2015. Before Jordan moves on from the Writing Center, we decided to sit down with him to discuss a few highlights from his time here in the Writing Center.

WriteOn: What brought you to the WC? Or, in other words, how did you end up as a consultant in the WC?
Jordan: I want to be a teacher, and I thought the WC would help refine my teaching strategies.

WO: In what ways are you challenged as a WC consultant?
JR: I still find the urge to take a red pen to grammar mistakes instead of pointing them out, and I’m not always 100% confident when it is something out of my field.

WO: How has your time as a consultant helped you improve as a writer?
JR: Seeing other people’s writing helps me objectively see how certain strategies do or do not work, which I can then apply to my own writing.

WO: How do you foresee your time spent as a consultant benefitting you in your future profession?
JR: I want to teach English classes at the college level, and I’ve seen what college students, including graduate students, struggle with in their writing, which helps equip me for teaching.

WO: Do you have any specific memories of your time as a consultant that you would like to share?
JR: I feel like I’ve been able to make an impact specifically on freshmen; the freshmen have allowed me to refine my teaching strategies and I feel like I’ve seen positive results in them as a result.
Professor Spotlight

Dr. Tim Morris is a Professor of English at UT Arlington and a consistent supporter of the UTA Writing Center. He has recommended students for the position of Writing Center Consultant, including our consultant and interviewer, Allison. We caught up with Dr. Morris to discuss his personal and professional experience with writing.

ALLISON: In what ways is writing important in your field?
MORRIS: You know, to some extent, in the middle of my career, writing became my field. I started to do sports writing and journalism and things that might be considered creative nonfiction. Then, a couple of years later, I got very interested in teaching composition pedagogy, so I moved to doing some teacher training for our Graduate Teaching Assistant program. So writing is really pretty pervasive for me. It’s what I do, and I’m lucky enough that I have a job where I get to do it.

A: How does writing ability play a part in professional success?
M: Well, as English students know, writing means so many different things. It can mean invention, and I deal with that a lot in my classes. Just the capacity to generate ideas and think through a subject is very important. And then there is the process, the arrangement, and style of writing that is essential for peer communication. I know, to some extent, it is a value in any professional situation just to be able to knock out a couple hundred words on a subject without thinking about it. The more one practices this, the better one gets at doing one’s job in an organization. I think we see that in any kind of job you have. Even if you’re in writing [as a field], sometimes you just need to turn your brain off and write some words in some process. This definitely applies in the corporate world – in medicine, in law, I’d say. Lots of professions.

A: What strategies do you use to encourage your students to visit the Writing Center?
M: At the moment, I don’t teach classes that have really gone in that direction. Do you ever see people come in from Structure [of Modern English]? Because you are very good at that class. Do you see them there?

A: Not from Structure of Modern English, so much. You know, a lot of times, with the way the Writing Center works, most people who are in the English field don’t feel that they need to come to Writing Center, even though most of our clients from English classes are from Comp I and Comp II. We do definitely get some of the more upper level clients, but most of the time, we’re dealing with papers that are from outside the field and don’t have as much practice in writing. We do encourage people from the English field to come because we can always work with people from literature classes or anything where you have to write a paper! We can always improve more, even if we are in the field. Even though I work there, I still sometimes seek out help from my coworkers and get their standpoint on different things if I’m having trouble.

M: I think that’s a factor. Honestly, the classes I teach this semester have been either the upper division classes where a lot of my students are tutors or this structure class, which, if you remember, doesn’t require a lot of writing, per say. But maybe I should work more by encouraging people, saying, “Go to the Writing Center if you don’t understand this! Ask for a tutor who did well in 2340. They can give some extra information.”

A: In what ways have you seen your students improve as writers after visiting the Writing Center?
M: I used to see that in previous years. In First Year English, which I taught quite a bit, it often came back as a narrative, saying, “Yeah, I was really helped by working with a given tutor” on return. I think that often the thing I heard from time to time was that they were forced to talk a lot. It’s not like you’re going in and you’re listening to the tutor lecture to you. That you, as a student in the WC, have to go in and have to actively learn, to be told “tell me what you’re doing and what you’re trying to do.” The best way to learn things is to explain them to other people, even if you might initially think that you don’t know what you’re doing!

A: What would you say to fellow faculty members who are unaware of the services offered by the Writing Center?
M: I’d encourage them to go over and take a look! I have given tours to our new assistant professors, for instance – we have three new assistant professors in our department this year. I ought to talk with [the Writing Center Director] about having a day when they can all come over and see!
**Fall 2015 Workshops**

**Writer's Studio, Central Library Room 4ll, 6:00 p.m.**
Oct. 14: Sentence Structure  
Oct. 19: Passive Voice  
Oct. 28: Verb Usage  
Nov. 5: Revising and Editing  
Nov. 10: Punctuation  
Nov. 19: Conjunctions  

**Writer's Studio, Central Library Room 4ll, 12:00 p.m.**  
Nov. 11: Synthesis Essay

**Where Are They Now?**

Since graduating from UTA in May 2015, our former tutor Devin Nguyen embarked on a journey as a member of the Peace Corps. He was Sworn-In at a ceremony in Addis Ababa, the U.S. Embassy of Ethiopia. Devin recently moved to his official site for service, Motta, a semi-town in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, where he will work as a Peace Corps English Language Facilitator teaching English grammar to 9th grade students. Devin claims that, in many ways, his experience as a Writing Center Consultant at UTA prepared him for teaching in the Peace Corps: “Having worked at the UTA Writing Center as a Writing Consultant, I've refined my sentence construction skills, as well as mastered parts of Standard English grammar... I am also a better communicator now, whether it be in a classroom environment or a one-on-one setting.” Of course, Devin explains, his students will not draft multiple-body paragraphs with a central thesis. Nevertheless, Devin finds that, as a facilitator, he can effectively aid students in producing authentic, clear, and concise work by guiding his students through the writing process: “My job here pushes for student-centered teaching, meaning I work as a facilitator to help guide my students. In that same line, being a Writing Center Consultant is not about editing and re-writing the work of the client. Instead, we are there to help clarify and facilitate the client's authentic train of thought.” Congratulations Devin on your achievement and we wish you the best on your two-year journey in the Peace Corps!

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