Transforming Writing Support: An Empirical Study of Writing Fellows in Advanced, Discipline-Specific Writing Courses

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Slides available at www.sjsu.edu/wac.
Research Questions

• Are there differences in how junior-level, discipline-specific writing students work with Writing Fellows and Writing Center tutors?
  • Do they tend to work with them at different points in the writing process?
  • Do they work with them on different topics?

• How do student and instructor opinions compare between courses supported by Writing Fellows and those without Fellows?
Overview

The following numbers are from 2016-2017, in which we placed Writing Fellows in 16 sections of junior-level, discipline-specific courses (100W). This table compiles information regarding usage of Writing Center tutors and Writing Fellows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value 1</th>
<th>Value 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sections supported by Fellows</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who used Writing Center tutoring</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Writing Center tutoring sessions</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of Writing Center tutoring sessions per student</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of students who used Writing Center tutors</td>
<td>12.05%</td>
<td>21.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who double dipped</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students who used Writing Center and/or Writing Fellows tutoring</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>26.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

• A quasi-experiment in which we surveyed students from 20 sections of junior-level discipline-specific courses all across the curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Science</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Eight sections supported by Writing Fellows, who worked five hours per week providing embedded supplemental instruction.

• Twelve sections not supported by Writing Fellows, but with access to the Writing Center and other forms of supplemental instruction on campus.

• Usage data was collected from Writing Fellows and Writing Center tutors, as well as opinion data from instructors and students in their classes.
Challenges and Limitations: Reporting and Data Collection

Writing Center

• Data was collected through WCOnline. Demographic data was reported by students.
• Students input information before a tutoring session when they scheduled an appointment (e.g., stage of the writing process).
• Writing Center tutors wrote client reports in the WCOnline.

Writing Fellows

• Data was collected through Qualtrics. No demographic data was collected.
• Writing Fellows input all the information after a tutoring session (e.g., stage of the writing process).
• Writing Fellows wrote client reports when they filled out the Qualtrics survey.
Challenges and Limitations: Courses Serve Disparate Disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100W Course</th>
<th>Majors Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMS/HUM/RELS</td>
<td>American Studies, Asian Studies, Comparative Religious Studies, European Studies, Humanities, Liberal Arts, Middle East Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM</td>
<td>Business, Communication Studies, Speech Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>English, English Education, Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORL</td>
<td>Chinese, Foreign Language Education, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPRF/HS/NUFS/NURS/OCTH</td>
<td>Health Professions, Health Science, Nursing, Nutrition, Occupational Therapy, Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCI</td>
<td>African American Studies, Mexican American Studies, Organizational Studies, Sociology, Women’s Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges and Limitations: Scope of the Study

Writing Center

- Data was collected for the entire year (summer 2016 through spring 2017).
- 8,675 students were enrolled in 375 sections of 100W across the university.
- 406 students had 780 sessions, averaging 1.92 sessions per student (4.68% of all 100W students).

Writing Fellows

- Data was collected for the fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters only.
- 390 students were enrolled in 16 sections that had embedded Writing Fellows (4.5% of 100W students and 4.3% of sections).
- 85 students had 133 sessions, averaging 1.56 sessions per student (21.79% of 100W students with Fellows).
FALL 2016 HEADCOUNT BY COLLEGE AND DEGREE

- Applied Sciences and Arts: Undergraduates 4691, Graduates 1053
- Business: Undergraduates 5320, Graduates 152
- Education: Undergraduates 985, Graduates 814
- Engineering and the Arts: Undergraduates 5060, Graduates 2335
- Humanities and Social Sciences: Undergraduates 244, Graduates 3394
- Science: Undergraduates 426, Graduates 4401
- Social Sciences: Undergraduates 430, Graduates 6
- Undeclared: Undergraduates 1577

FALL 2016 HEADCOUNT BY COLLEGE

- Applied Sciences and Arts: 22%
- Business: 16%
- Engineering: 15%
- Humanities and the Arts: 11%
- Science: 9%
- Social Sciences: 15%
- Undeclared: 5%

- Education: 5%
100W SECTIONS AND ENROLLMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Total Enrolled</th>
<th># Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences and Arts</td>
<td>1343</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2423</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and the Arts</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>2272</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
36.21% of students had two or more tutoring sessions with Writing Center tutors.

27.06% of students had two or more tutoring sessions with Writing Fellows.
WRITING CENTER TUTORING SESSIONS BY STAGE

- Planning / Prewriting: 8%
- Drafting: 44%
- Revising / Polishing: 48%

WRITING FELLOWS TUTORING SESSIONS BY STAGE

- Planning / Prewriting: 26%
- Revising / Polishing: 42%
- Drafting: 32%
WRITING CENTER TUTORING SESSIONS BY FOCUS

- Content / Organization: 36%
- Grammar: 55%
- Formatting: 9%

WRITING FELLOWS TUTORING SESSIONS BY FOCUS

- Content / Organization: 74%
- Grammar: 16%
- Formatting: 10%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Center</th>
<th>Writing Fellows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>Analytical Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Memo</td>
<td>Argumentative Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover Letter</td>
<td>Article Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Investigation</td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Business Memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Business Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Statement</td>
<td>Compare/Contrast Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Résumé</td>
<td>Personal Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>Research Paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Opinions

Are you a good writer?

- I am a good writer.
- I am an okay writer.
- I am a poor/struggling writer.

With Fellows
- 21% - I am a good writer.
- 7% - I am an okay writer.
- 58% - I am a poor/struggling writer.

Without Fellows
- 24% - I am a good writer.
- 18% - I am an okay writer.
- 62% - I am a poor/struggling writer.

With Fellows
- 33% - I am a good writer.
- 5% - I am an okay writer.
- 5% - I am a poor/struggling writer.

Without Fellows
- 25% - I am a good writer.
- 17% - I am an okay writer.
- 58% - I am a poor/struggling writer.
Student Opinions

Is writing easy for you?

- Writing is easy for me.
- Writing is challenging for me, but I can do it.
- Writing is difficult for me.

With Fellows:
- Writing is easy: 72%
- Writing is challenging: 16%
- Writing is difficult: 11%

Without Fellows:
- Writing is easy: 73%
- Writing is challenging: 21%
- Writing is difficult: 6%

With Fellows:
- Writing is easy: 62%
- Writing is challenging: 33%
- Writing is difficult: 5%

Without Fellows:
- Writing is easy: 58%
- Writing is challenging: 33%
- Writing is difficult: 8%
Do you like to write?

- I like to write.
- Writing is okay — I neither like it nor dislike it. It's fine.
- I do not like to write.

Student Opinions

With Fellows
- I like to write: 66%
- Writing is okay: 18%
- I do not like to write: 16%

Without Fellows
- I like to write: 52%
- Writing is okay: 30%
- I do not like to write: 18%

With Fellows
- I like to write: 57%
- Writing is okay: 38%
- I do not like to write: 5%

Without Fellows
- I like to write: 67%
- Writing is okay: 17%
- I do not like to write: 17%
Student Opinions

Did you improve this semester?

- I have become a much better writer.
- I have become a somewhat better writer.
- I have not improved as a writer.

With Fellows Without Fellows

With Fellows: 64% 21%
Without Fellows: 61% 18%
With Fellows: 62% 38%
Without Fellows: 50% 25%

I have become a much better writer. I have become a somewhat better writer. I have not improved as a writer.
Student Opinions

Did you receive enough help?

- I have received a lot of help to improve my writing.
- I have received an okay amount of help to improve my writing.
- I have not received enough help to improve my writing. I would like to receive more.

With Fellows
- 53% received a lot of help
- 44% received an okay amount of help
- 3% did not receive enough help

Without Fellows
- 55% received a lot of help
- 33% received an okay amount of help
- 12% did not receive enough help

With Fellows
- 67% received a lot of help
- 33% received an okay amount of help
- 0% did not receive enough help

Without Fellows
- 55% received a lot of help
- 18% received an okay amount of help
- 27% did not receive enough help
Instructor Opinions

Are your students good writers?

- Good / Pretty good writers?
- Adequate writers?
- Poor writers?
Instructor Opinions

Did your students improve this semester?

- Improved substantially as writers?
- Improved somewhat as writers?
- Did not improve much at all as writers?
Instructor Opinions

Did you have enough time this semester?

- I will have/had more than enough time to work with my students to improve their writing.
- I will have/had just enough time to work with my students to improve their writing.
- I will not/did not have enough time to work with my students to improve their writing.

With Fellows
- More than enough time: 25%
- Just enough time: 75%
- Not enough time: 0%

Without Fellows
- More than enough time: 75%
- Just enough time: 25%
- Not enough time: 0%
Conclusions:
The Added Value of Writing Fellows

• Students tend to work with Fellows earlier in the writing process, and they tend to focus more on higher-order concerns.

• Students in courses supported by Fellows seek additional tutoring services from the Writing Center at a higher rate.

• Students in sections with Fellows have better attitudes about themselves as writers and believe they have improved more as writers.

• Faculty tend to see their students in similar ways, but faculty in sections with Fellows think their students improved significantly more.
Next Steps

• Streamline processes. In fall 2017, Writing Fellows became part of the Writing Center. Both now use the WCOnline system and have uniform training.
• Continue to clarify the differences between student-derived data vs. Writing Fellow/Writing Tutor-derived data.
• Compare data from 100W courses with Fellows to data from FYW courses with Fellows (which we collected last year).
• Continue to study usage of Writing Fellows and Writing Center tutors in 100W junior-level writing courses.
• Expand course-embedded tutoring to other writing-intensive courses.

Thank you!