

2008-2009 Skidmore College Writing Center Annual Report

Phil Boshoff, Writing Center Director, June 2009

I. WRITING CENTER STAFF, 2008-2009

Seniors: Michal Adut ('09); Erin Anderson ('09); Christopher Bradt ('09); Paul (Max) Colmers ('09); Sarah Dobro [Co-Head Tutor] ('09); Erin Frymire ('09); Melissa Macey ('09); Brian Naslund ('09); Anastassia Pugatch ('09); Alex Rindler ('09); Jessica Spier ('09); Christopher Zimmermann ('09)

Juniors: Johanna Barr** ('10); Kelly Bischoff ('10); Lauren Donovan** ('10); Samuel Elam [Co-Head Tutor] ('10); Jenna Gersie ('10); Monica Jimenez* ('10); Jane Kelly **('10); Megan Kochiss* ('10); Sara Krasner ('10); Emily Lacroix ('10); Jedd Levine* ('10); Alexander Moldauer ('10); Andrew Taylor ('10); Elizabeth Weiner*** ('10)

Sophomores: Catherine (Katy) Augustine+ ('11); Jacob Bauer-Anstadt ('11); Jeremiah Budin ++('11); Emily Craver++('11); Lucille (Lucy) Flood+ ('11); Mary Frances Johnson++ ('11); Galen Koch+ ('11); Victoria Neff ('11); Rachelle Oldmixon ('11); Anne Potish ('11); Charles (Jake) Saddle++('11); Leah Starker+ ('11); Kaitlin Vallas++('11); Jocelyn Wascher+ ('11)

Non-matriculating adult auditors: Martha Pearl (Fall 2008)

Graduated: Twelve (12); returning: twenty-three (23).

EN 303H enrollment: 25 (overload of eight students).

*tutored fall 2008; **tutored spring 2009; ***studied abroad 2008-2009; +will study abroad fall 2009; ++ will study abroad spring 2010

Head Tutoring and Writing Center Award: Sarah Dobro ('09) and Sam Elam ('10) were Co-Head Tutors for 2008-2009. Erin Frymire ('09) received the 2008-2009 Writing Center Tutoring Award. Sam Elam ('10) and Anne Potish ('11) will be Head Tutors for 2009-2010. Several tutors earned departmental and all-college distinctions: Erin Frymire ('09) received The Sally Chapman Thompson '48 Prize in Literature as well as a Periclean Scholar Award.

Assistant Writing Center Director: Martha Wiseman joined the Writing Center staff as assistant director. She offered invaluable assistance in all phases of the Writing Center's operation: she sat in on EN 303H: Peer Tutoring Project, acted as liaison to the Scribner Seminars, held weekly tutoring hours, met with faculty members, worked with special-needs student writers, provided guidance and support to the tutoring staff, consulted on decisions and initiatives, and conducted five all-college workshops on grammar, punctuation, and stylistics.

II. TUTORING STATISTICS

Writing Center tutoring responsibilities include English 103 tutoring and tutoring via walk-in hours and appointments, available to all members of the Skidmore community.

EN 103 Tutoring: For the fall term, we again established evening walk-in hours for EN 103 students to meet with tutors familiar with the EN 103 curriculum. We reserved a study room adjacent to Scribner Library 440 for EN 103 tutoring; by thus separating 103 tutoring from walk-in tutoring, we freed space in the Writing Center. In the spring, at Michael Marx's urging, we initiated a new tutoring procedure for EN 103 students, which meant we no longer needed to reserve evening hours for them. Each of these students was given fourteen (14) blank tutoring report forms and told to visit the Writing Center once weekly throughout the term. The EN 103 students provided tutors with the tutoring report forms; tutors completed the forms following each session and returned them to the EN 103 students, who, in turn, submitted the forms to their professor. We found this modification to EN 103 tutoring increased the frequency and number of EN 103 sessions,

Walk-in and Appointment Tutoring: As has been our practice, we tutored students during walk-in hours; students could also call or stop in to schedule appointments. Hours in the fall were M-TH 2:00PM-midnight; F 12:00-4:00pm; Sun. 4:00PM-midnight. To accommodate increased tutoring demands, in the spring semester of 2009, we added not only two hours Monday through Thursday, opening at noon on those days, but also Saturday hours, from noon to 4:00. Unless students did not want their professors notified that they had been tutored, we mailed their instructors brief summaries of tutoring sessions as recorded on the gold tutoring report forms. We recorded a record number of 1,980 on-the-book tutoring sessions; an additional two dozen informal, off-the record conversations and phone calls to answer quick questions brought our total number of consultations about writing to 2,000 in 2008-2009.

Fall-Spring Term Appointments 1999-2009

+2008-2009: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	1057	Spring Term	923	Total	1980
2007-2008: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	747	Spring Term	679	Total	1426
2006-2007: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	593	Spring Term	443	Total	1036
2005-2006: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	379	Spring Term	359	Total	738
2004-2005: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	410	Spring Term	323	Total	733
2003-2004: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	495	Spring Term	356	Total	851
2002-2003: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	350	Spring Term	262	Total	612
2001-2002: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	353	Spring Term	244	Total:	597
2000-2001: Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term:	301	Spring Term	267	Total	568
*1999-2000 Walk-ins/Appts.	Fall Term	418	Spring Term:	412	Total	830

***First Year in Ladd Hall**

+First Year in Lucy Scribner Library

<u>Tutoring Sessions by Discipline</u>	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>
English Dept. Writing Seminars	674	440	293
English Dept. Courses	351	266	192
Scribner Seminars	119	126	103
HEOP	13	22	4
LS 2	NA	NA	2
Education Studies	24	14	20
Government/Law & Society	100	69	50

Art History & Art	77	37	43
History	45	35	37
Sociology & Social Work	99	52	16
Mgt. & Business	97	38	36
Economics	29	38	34
Psychology	32	36	18
Philosophy/Religion	36	45	43
Anthropology	39	24	24
Classics	11	7	9
Women's Studies	21	13	10
American Studies	47	59	44
Self-Determined Major	0	0	0
Biology & Neuroscience	9	9	6
Music	6	5	4
Physics	1	1	0
Exercise Science	8	3	3
Geosciences	1	1	1
Foreign Languages	21	9	1
Misc. (UWW, applications, letters)	68	30	27
Asian Studies	2	4	1
International Affairs	17	5	3
Environmental Studies	7	3	6
Chemistry	1	23	6
Dance	4	0	0
Latin American Studies	15	0	0
Mathematics	7	0	0
Theatre	3	0	0
Total:	1980	1426	1036

Miscellaneous, ESL, and Special-Needs Tutoring

The great majority of tutoring sessions were with matriculating residential students. We also tutored two members of the support staff, two UWW students, and three non-matriculating ESL students. In addition, tutors worked with sixty-eight (68) students who sought assistance with personal statements for graduate school, internship and fellowship applications (Fulbright and Truman), SGA offices, internships, summer jobs, and with job cover letters and personal writing projects.

In 2008-2009, students who identified their second language as English (ESL) accounted for **442** of the **1980** tutoring sessions, or **22%** of the total number of tutoring sessions. This percentage compared to **286** of the total number of **1426** sessions in 2007-2008, or **20%** of all tutoring sessions. In comparison, in 2006-2007, students who identified their second language as English (ESL) accounted for **182** of the total of **1036** tutoring sessions, or **18%** of all sessions. In 2005-2006, ESL sessions comprised **135** of the total number of **733** tutoring sessions, or **18%** of all sessions. In 2004-2005, ESL sessions comprised **106** of the **851** total number of tutoring sessions, or **12 %** of all sessions. We do not keep statistics on students with learning disabilities for reasons of confidentiality; six tutors reported conducting sessions with students self-identifying a “learning disability.”

Looking at the 2008-2009 Statistics:

- We tallied tutoring sessions by gender. In 2008-2009, of the total number of students tutored, **26%** were men, **73%** women (**1%** not reporting gender). In 2007-2008, **35%** men and **64%** women (**1%** not reporting gender). In 2006-2007, of the total number of tutoring appointments, **35%** men were tutored and **65%** women. These percentages compare to men **33%** and women **67%** in 2005-2006; men **41%**, women **59%** in 2004-2005; and men **29%**, women **71%** in 2003-2004.
- Again in 2008-2009, students in English department classes comprised the highest percentage of tutoring appointments: **51%**. In contrast, percentages of students tutored in English department courses comprised **49.5 %** in 2007-2008; **47%** in 2006-2007; **39%** in 2005-2006; and **31%** in 2004-2005. It is worth noting in contrast that these percentages are lower than a decade earlier: in 1998-1999, tutoring sessions with students in English classes comprised **66%** of the total number of tutoring sessions.
- In 2009-2009, as was true in 2005-2006, fifty-five percent (**55%**) of the walk-in/appointment tutoring sessions were with first-year students and sophomores. However, for historical contrast, in 1997-1998, more than two-thirds (**67%**) of the tutoring sessions were with first-years and sophomores. And in 1992-93 nearly eighty percent (**79%**) of the student writers tutored were first-years and sophomores.
- Students in upper-level courses are increasingly finding tutoring sessions useful. In 2008-2009, tutoring sessions with student writers in 300-level courses increased to just over thirty percent (**31%**) of all tutoring sessions. In 2005-2006 tutoring sessions with students enrolled in 300-level courses across the college accounted for twenty-five percent (**25%**) of all tutoring sessions. In 2003-2004 they accounted for approximately twenty-two percent (**22%**) of the total sessions, and in 2002-2003, student writers in 300-level courses accounted for approximately twenty percent (**20%**) of the total tutoring sessions.
- The average tutoring session in 2008-2009 was again forty minutes, as it had been in 2007-2008. In 2003-2005, fifty-five minutes was the average length of a tutoring session, and in 2002-2003 fifty minutes was the average length per walk-in/appointment tutoring session.

III. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

There were ten staff meetings in 2008-2009 (six fall, four spring). Meeting agendas typically included announcements, reviews of tutoring reports, and conversations about concerns arising in tutoring sessions. In September, we reviewed operating policies and procedures. At our second staff meeting, we discussed plagiarism and academic integrity protocols. October meetings included our preparation for the Celebration Weekend open house and a punctuation-review session. In November we discussed tutor surfing—students working with more than one tutor on an assignment. In December we revisited our policy of working with student writers on take-home exams and longer papers. In April we met with Jamin Totino, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, to learn more about effective ways to work with students with learning disabilities that affect their writing.

IV. 2008-2009 ACTIVITIES

- Martha provided pedagogical support to Scribner Seminar instructors, consulting with them on ways to work effectively and efficiently with student writers. She assisted with sequencing and designing assignments and with assessing student papers; suggested possible approaches to writing activities; and offered in-class writing workshops.
- We found that Scribner Seminar peer mentors and Writing Center tutors could best support one another when mentors talked with seminar students primarily about content issues—readings, assignments, class notes—and tutors helped students with composing, drafting, revising, and editing their papers.
- As we have in the past, we photocopied tutoring reports and sent them, with students' permission, to the student writers' instructors, so that instructors would know what was covered in tutoring sessions. In response to the reports, we often received helpful feedback from faculty, clarifying goals for individual student writers and helping us to work more productively with them.
- In October we hosted our annual Celebration Weekend Open House. We greeted and chatted with approximately forty visiting parents and students about what we do and how we do it. We also held an open house in October to welcome faculty members to our new space in the Scribner Library.
- In early November we once again matched experienced tutors with EN 303H students so that the experienced tutors could mentor the students as they began working in the Writing Center.
- Martha and I met twice with the Dean of Studies, the staff of the Office of Student Academic Services, and the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities to discuss more closely coordinating our services. We came up with a system for student referrals, and over the summer we will develop appropriate referral forms. We also discussed ways we can work together to provide greater support to ESL students.
- Thanks to Jenna Gersie ('10), our website reflects our new location and staff changes.
- Erin Frymire, Sarah Dobro, and Emily Lacroix are to be commended for their dedicated work in reading longer papers and theses.

V. OBSERVATIONS

A. The Positives: This was another record year for tutoring appointments—it was our busiest year of operation thus far. In terms of appointments and daily operation, there were five hundred and fifty-four (**554**) more official sessions than in 2007-2008 and nine hundred and forty-four (**944**) more sessions than in 2002-2004, our second busiest year. We approximate that returnees

(those coming to the Writing Center for two or more tutoring sessions within this academic year) accounted for just under **40% (38.8%)** of our total number of tutoring sessions, an increase of more than 10% over 2007-2008.

Several factors led to this year's increase. Relocation to Lucy Scribner Library 440 was the most apparent. Being adjacent to one of the busiest computer clusters on campus boosted our walk-in traffic. In fact, there were a number of "off-book," unofficial Q & A conversations that evolved between tutors and student writers. We saw spikes in walk-ins and appointments on week nights (especially Monday and Thursday nights) and during mid-term and examination weeks; our main space was frequently crowded to overflowing at these times. We reserved a small conference room to accommodate the influx. Overall, our new location raised our visibility and thus enhanced our viability.

Our staff willingly and effectively handled the challenges of our new space. Sarah Dobro and Sam Elam oversaw the daily operation of the Center diligently, applying their troubleshooting skills, dedication to building staff camaraderie, and insistence that tutors perform their duties with seriousness and professionalism. Conversations with faculty colleagues continue to reveal their appreciation for the quality of the tutors' work. And students told us that their professors' rigorous comments on their papers resulted in their working harder to produce effective final drafts. With student writers talking up their Writing Center experience to classmates, word-of-mouth referrals brought new students to us. For several students, Writing Center tutors offered something of an academic lifeline. In sum, the commitment and enthusiasm of our exceptional staff of writing tutors coalesced with heightened student and faculty writing expectations to reinforce the central role of writing at Skidmore.

It is worth revisiting an observation from the 2006-2007 annual report. In student affairs literature, the term "extended curriculum" refers to students' informally engaging in opportunities to expand their interests and conversations about academic issues beyond the classroom. Writing Center tutors build a community that facilitates conversation about writing and academic standards and expectations. During this year's Mellon-sponsored "Living the Liberal Arts" panel of alums from English, four of the participants praised the close ties they had formed with their fellow tutors and fondly remembered their Writing Center conversations about writing. Moreover, a number of tutors have gone on to writing-related careers. Several are editors, web writers, and researchers. One started an on-line publishing firm. Former tutors are pursuing graduate work in Union's MAT program, in education at Brown, in Literary Studies at Lehigh, with two at The University of Rochester, one each at CUNY and UVA, and one completing doctoral work in rhetoric and composition at The University of Illinois. Two recent graduates are working in boarding schools. Two will participate next year in Skidmore's Teach in China program and one in Teach for America.

There is thus little question that the Writing Center plays an increasingly crucial institutional support role at Skidmore.

B. Areas of Concern: ESL tutoring. In 2008-2009, students who identified their second language as English (ESL) accounted for **442** of the total number of **1980** tutoring sessions; **22%** of all sessions were with ESL students. This proportion compared to **286** of the total number of tutoring sessions **1426** in 2007-2008, or **20%** of the total tutoring sessions. Thus, approximately one of every five tutoring sessions we have conducted over the past two years has been with a self-identified NNS (non-native speaker). Martha and I have been discussing with the staff of the Office of Student Academic Services ways to share our resources, referring NNSs to the Office

of Academic Services for long-term tutoring and encouraging the Office of Academic Services staff to refer NNS students to the Writing Center for task-specific tutoring, We believe there is a strong need to bring an ESL specialist to campus, perhaps sharing this person's duties between the Writing Center and the Office of Academic Services. We are looking into the possibility of establishing an internship position at Skidmore for ESL graduate students in programs at The University at Albany or The College of St. Rose. We have found that Writing Centers at a number of other liberal arts colleges of analogous size employ part-time professional ESL tutors.

Proofreading: Many students have asked us to limit our interactions with them to "quick questions, spot checks"—"I just need you to go over my paper for grammatical errors." These requests tend to come at the last minute, when the paper is due an hour or less after the tutoring session, for example. We need to work on ways to accommodate these requests while not compromising our determination to work on the "whole paper" and our overall goal of helping students understand writing strategies. We must emphasize that we are not essentially a proofreading service, and we must clarify our guidelines on last-minute requests, guidelines that apply as well to the next area of concern.

Long papers. The number of students seeking last-minute assistance with theses, senior projects, and lengthy 300-level papers taxed our tutoring staff, particularly at the end of the spring term. We will re-examine our policy on working with students on lengthy papers, particularly in terms of the timing of requests for assistance on these papers.

VI. 2009-2010 PLANS

- Discussion with faculty. Martha and I will reserve hours to meet with faculty interested in discussing problem papers, assignments, and writing in their courses.
- ESL Students: Tutors will continue to offer tutoring support for NNSs. We will work closely with both the Office of Student Academic Services and Jamin Totino, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, to establish the best ways to support special-needs students, and NNSs in particular.
- Support of Scribner Seminars. As Writing Center liaison to the FYE, Martha will continue to work with Beau Breslin, FYE Director, to reinforce the role of writing in the seminars. She will again provide support to instructors on all kinds of writing issues and will be available for consultations and in-class activities. Beau is working with us to integrate this type of support more fully into seminar instruction. Martha will also help to differentiate the tasks of Scribner Seminar peer mentors and Writing Center tutors.
- Writing workshops: Under Martha Wiseman's guidance, she, the tutoring staff, and I will conduct a series of workshops on topics related to students' writing. We will announce these events in time for faculty to plan them into their syllabi.
- Lucy Scribner Library space: We will seek ways to take more advantage of our location. We have preliminary plans to offer group tutoring sessions during mid-term and finals weeks.
- Writing-in-the disciplines checklists: We plan over the summer to solicit one-page writing-in-the-discipline checklists from faculty members, so that tutors will have a quick reference guide for discipline-specific tutoring sessions. This will not only assist the tutors in individual sessions but also help to ensure consistency with departmental and faculty requirements for writing.

- Short-session report forms: We will devise a tutoring report form to differentiate brief tutoring queries from longer sessions.

VII. 2008-2009 FINAL THOUGHTS

This was unquestionably a banner year for the Skidmore College Writing Center. Our relocation to Lucy Scribner Library made our services and staff highly visible. I wish to thank Ruth Copans, Judy Moliero, and the Lucy Scribner Library staff for welcoming us to the library and making our relocation comfortable.

Reaching the 2,000 tutoring-session level is an achievement for a small college. The confidence that students have shown in the tutoring support they receive confirms that the Writing Center is one of the college's premier academic support services. The Writing Center is a place where students can test ideas, discuss drafts, and address their writing concerns in a student writer–peer tutor conversation. We will continue to emphasize this essential role, so that students can use the Writing Center to even greater advantage.

In *How College Affects Students, Vol. 2: A Third Decade of Research*, Pascarella and Tarenzinni observe that the millennial generation (current undergraduates) are dialogic learners, who have grown up in educational environments where peer collaboration and discussion-based classrooms were the norm. Thus, our students are increasingly comfortable incorporating collaborative learning opportunities into their Skidmore education. Many consider engaging with others in dialogue about their papers a natural part of their writing process. Unfortunately, many students choose to collaborate at the eleventh hour. The modus operandi of the majority of our students is to schedule a tutoring session or walk-in an hour or two (in some case minutes before) a paper is due. Part of our mission to the community needs to be educating students about ways to make more effective use of the writing process—and even more effective use of the Writing Center. Rather than trying to plan and write a final draft of a paper at the last minute, students need to take full advantage of each stage of writing: receiving a writing task, planning, drafting, revising, rereading, and doing final editing and touching up prior to submission.

Goal One, “Student Engagement and Academic Achievement,” of Skidmore’s *Strategic Plan* states, “We will challenge every Skidmore student to achieve academic excellence through full engagement with our rich and rigorous educational experience.” The Writing Center looks forward to contributing to the upcoming conversations about writing and writing support as we implement the CEPP plan and move forward with the *Strategic Plan*. The twenty-nine-year mission of the Writing Center at Skidmore has been, first and foremost, to provide a place dedicated to thoughtful and productive student-to-student discussion of writing. We work on guiding student writers to become effective self-critics, able to spot weaknesses and errors for themselves and make their own adjustments and corrections.

Finally, the addition of Martha Wiseman as Assistant Director enables us to enhance both development of the undergraduate tutors as well as our outreach to the community. Martha Wiseman has been an outstanding addition to the staff. We will continue to find ways to share Martha’s wide-ranging knowledge of writing with both students and faculty members.

Respectfully submitted,
Phil Boshoff, Writing Center Director
June 15, 2009