Graduate Writing Center End-of-Semester Report
May 2016
Submitted by Nancy Welch,
Professor of English and Coordinator, Graduate Writing Center

UVM’s new Graduate Writing Center opened its door at the start of the Spring 2016 semester with funding from the Graduate College and administrative support from the Writing in the Disciplines program and the undergraduate Writing Center. The GWC’s earliest weeks were devoted to training four peer consultants—from masters and doctoral programs in English, History, Pharmacology, and Psychology—and to getting out the word about how the GWC can support graduate writers.

Who’s Coming to the GWC
Over this pilot semester the GWC recorded 150 contact hours with graduate students in individual and small-group consultations and in four Sunday graduate writing retreats.

Student Contacts through the Graduate Writing Center, Spring 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of session</th>
<th>Contacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual sessions</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group tutoring</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops/Retreats</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Contacts</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While students making individual and small-group appointments have come primarily from graduate programs in the College of Nursing and Allied Health, GWC consultants have met with students from all of the colleges with graduate programs.

The Sunday Graduate Writing Retreats (offering three to four hours of quiet writing time with healthy snacks, coffee and tea, and the option to confer with a consultant) have been especially popular with graduate students from RSNR and CESS; Jump Start camp enrollment is almost evenly distributed across students in CALS, CAS, CEMS, and CESS with one enrollee to date from RSNR.
To date, we also have thirteen graduate students enrolled for the June 20-23 Thesis and Dissertation Jump Start Camp.

### Jump Start Camp Enrollment by College

![Pie chart showing enrollment by college](chart.png)

**What Students Seek from the GWC**

Students’ writing projects have included applications, proposals, and blogs with the majority of students seeking help with research articles, thesis or dissertation chapters, and literature reviews.

### Consultations by Genre

![Pie chart showing consultations by genre](chart2.png)

With a very few exceptions, most students made their appointment early in the writing process, seeking brainstorming help or feedback on the purpose, clarity, and organization of an early draft.

### Consultations by Goals

![Pie chart showing consultations by goal](chart3.png)
Only eight of the graduate students making appointments listed a first language (Chinese, French, Italian, Polish, and Vietnamese) other than English, and their specific concerns—how to organize a literature discussion or sign-post a longer research article or thesis chapter—did not differ markedly from the concerns of native speakers.

What Graduate Students Say about the GWC
Graduate students who visited the GWC completed exit surveys with 100 percent rating their meeting with a consultant and their satisfaction with the session as highly satisfactory. Comments offered on the surveys include

- “[My consultant] has taught me SO much about writing—about research and in general!”
- “My tutor helped me think about the goals and purposes of my writing that will help to bring it more clarity.”
- “[The session] helped me understand the process of organizing ideas in each paragraph.”
- “Thank you for offering such a helpful service,” wrote another. “I look forward to visiting again.”

Graduate students who attended the Sunday writing retreats also completed surveys and reported appreciation for the structured time, quiet space, and accountability for writing. “I accomplished more in the past three hours than I have in the past three months,” wrote one student.

Students also reported initial difficulty with learning about the GWC’s existence. “I think people need to use this service more, but it’s not really advertised. I had to dig to find this resource,” wrote one student. “I would have loved to use the writing center much sooner if I knew about it,” reported another. Students attending the Sunday writing retreats as well as one Friday Forum we held for thesis and dissertation writers also requested specific workshops on topics such as how to write a literature review or thesis proposal and how to manage time and the writing process over a long project.

What Are the GWC’s Challenges?
Space is one impediment, of course: The subterranean Waterman room has few passersby and does not visually communicate the GWC’s presence on campus; the GWC currently has access to the large room that would be needed for special-topic workshops only on Friday afternoons and weekends.

Other challenges in communicating the GWC’s existence and purpose have included limited administrative support for developing and maintaining the GWC’s initial website; graduate students’ (self-reported) tendency not to check their UVM email for announcements; and students’ and advisors’ assumptions that a writing center only serves those students who late in the writing process need proofreading or formatting help. In addition, international students who might benefit from the GWC’s support—in grasping U.S. academic genres and approaches as well as in sentence-level editing—rarely come from undergraduate institutions that offer such a resource and so are less likely on their own to see the value of making an appointment.

Beyond the Pilot: Plans and Goals for AY2017
These challenges point to the GWC’s goals for the 2016-2017 school year:
• To find avenues for promoting the GWC beyond our (soon-to-be-revamped) website and regular emails to graduate students and faculty—including by working with faculty who would like their students, singly or in small groups, to meet with graduate writing consultants on assignments that present students with a new genre or writing situation;

• To offer regular workshops on topics of interest, including “traveling” workshops that are both tailored for and take place within specific programs and classes;

In the coming year the GWC will also expand its services to support graduate students enrolled in online and low-residency degree programs (through consultations via Skype and Google Docs) and in the Global Gateway premaster’s program (most likely by “embedding” two consultants within the program). In addition, we will work closely with the undergraduate writing center and the Bailey Howe library on planning for a new integrated—and much more visible, accessible, and useable!—writing center space on Bailey-Howe’s ground floor for the 2018 academic year.

To meet these goals, the GWC is also growing. For the Fall semester we anticipate having nine paid graduate writing consultants from Community Development and Applied Economics, Education, English, Natural Resources, Pharmacology, and Psychology plus an additional writing consultant from Plant and Soil Sciences who (although her visa prevents her joining the paid staff) is working toward her Level II College Reading and Language Association (CRLA) tutor certification.

Integral to expanding the GWC services, reaching more students, and maintaining a high level of satisfaction is the training provided to the graduate writing consultants. The training we provide—twelve hours in advance of the semester plus biweekly tutor development workshops—also makes the GWC’s consultants eligible for certification by the College Reading and Language Association International Tutor Training Program. One consultant has already achieved the CRLA’s Level II certification while another will have her Level I certificate by early fall. Next year’s nine consultants all begin with significant undergraduate or graduate writing center tutoring experience, including working with nonnative speakers of English. Such experience will allow us to focus our pre-semester training and ongoing workshops on specific topics and concerns such as effective Skype tutoring with Google Docs and working with international graduate students as English language learners and advanced academics.