The F&M Writing Center has had quite the exciting year — we’ve hired our largest ever staff, expanded our presence on social media, and started a new tradition by participating in the first-ever International Write-In.

And now, we’re celebrating the return of our newsletter, *Active Voice*! Read on to see what the Center and our tutors have been up to this year!

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Reflections on our First Write-In

-By Steven Viera ’16

I remember walking into the Writing Center that night. Shivering from the cold, I glanced at the framed letters and pictures just as I do every time I climb the stairs in Diagnothian. But as I stepped inside, I saw the Center as I never had before—overflowing with students!

To the casual observer, it looked as though we had become the victim of some “occupy” movement. Simply taking a step forward required careful planning so as not to hit a laptop or students raising their hands, trying to flag down a tutor.

Such was my introduction to the Writing Center’s first Write-In!

What’s a write-in, you may ask? A write-in is when the staff of a writing center volunteers a night to meet students to burn the midnight oil and provide their services as tutors. Joining over twenty other colleges and universities, including Swarthmore, Kenyon, and Wellsley, we decided to host a Write-In of our own.

So, last semester, on the night of Sunday, December 7, the staff of the Writing Centers spent the hours of 10:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. hunkered down, helping students who came in for impromptu sessions. To visitors, we offered pizza, snacks, and enough caffeinated beverages to make a Red Bull addict uncomfortable. Tutors circulated the room to help anyone who had a question or wanted a second set of eyes for their essays. For those who didn’t like the bustle of Diagnothian, Kieper 200 was available as a quiet space in which to work. Every few minutes, we held a raffle where attendees had the chance to win a Writing Center mug. By the end of the night, over 150 students passed through the Center!

For us, this was a great affirmation of the Writing Center’s value to students! We’re happy to fill such an important function on campus, and we look forward to continue tutoring students in the future. For now, come visit us during our regular hours—and get ready for the next Write-In!
Why Wait? Write!

-By Ibrahim Kamara '15

You know, since I’ve become a Writing Center Assistant, hundreds of people have come up to me to inquire about the magical key to college writing. During my sessions, tutees hang onto every word, parsing through the boring talk of thesis statements and dangling modifiers, hoping to catch a glimpse into the obscure world of higher writing, hoping that I will reveal my secrets for successful college level compositions. Like a true magician, I keep my secrets close to the chest—it’s more fun that way. But also like a magician, I often disguise my tricks behind bad attempts at making myself seem super special.

Actually, the truth is none of that stuff before about hoards of people seeking my autograph happens; and there is no fairy-tale blueprint for doing well with college level writing. Now, if I haven’t already lost your trust, if I may, I would like to share with you my time-tested method at producing college papers. We all succumb to this and we are all cognizant of it. But we continue to allow it. Now, on the count of three, everybody:

STOP PROCRASTINATING.

Procrastination is the enemy of progress in college and it is especially problematic when it comes to paper writing. There is often a tendency to leave our essays on the back-burner until a day or so before they are due. Then we realize that the assignment isn’t one that lends itself to quick writing. Maybe the required length is seven pages, or maybe you have to compare two texts that, for a number of reasons out of your control, you haven’t read. Now, if you simply struggle to formulate a strong thesis, or if you don’t understand certain grammar rules, maybe procrastinating is the least of your problems. However, by starting assignments as soon as possible, you afford yourself the time to do your best work, to read that novel or to sharpen your subject/verb agreement. Most importantly, by getting the jump on an essay, you leave time for revision, which is indispensable to good writing. And revision includes more than just finding misplaced semi-colons or a quick visit to the Writing Center; it also includes playing around with word choice and sentence structure to match your style.

And this leads me to my final point. By starting an assignment early, you can really make it your own. One thing that has always helped me push through those dull, monotonous, analytical papers is knowing that I’ve made the piece read the way I want it to. If you start early enough, you can meet your professor’s requirements (length, number of sources etc.) while still making the final product your own, which should ultimately deliver a sense of accomplishment.

So, keep procrastination out of your vocabulary. When you get a prompt from your professor, do yourself a favor, and just start. But more importantly, have fun with it, develop a voice for yourself, and take pride in your writing.
Catching up with Steph Palazzo ’14

-By Briana Krewson ’17

How long did you work at the Center?

Three years. When I received the email to apply, I thought I would give it a shot, with nothing to lose. I never saw myself as a particularly good writer, but I always enjoyed the exchange of ideas and high-level discussion, something the Writing Center — and writing, generally speaking — facilitates quite nicely.

Why did you enjoy working at the center?

As a new F&M student, I wanted to join a genuine community, and the Writing Center provided me with just that. I have so much that I owe the people I ran into in the physically and intellectually open space that is the Center. Whether it was someone I tutored, a fellow tutor, or Dan, Justin, or Judith, I was constantly challenged to cultivate intellectual curiosity and be a lifelong learner — to ask the big questions and collaborate to pursue the answers.

More than just fostering the life of the mind, however, the Center was the site of some pretty fantastic and lasting friendships. Very few students find “their people” in college, and I feel blessed to have had (and still have) that opportunity. And those people are still my people, and I am still shocked they like to hang out with me.

What important lessons did the Center teach you?

The Writing Center taught me so much in such a short amount of time. I really do believe it molded both my writing and thinking patterns. It took me a while until tutoring actually clicked for me, and I began internalizing the mantra of the minimalist approach: Ask significant and leading questions and refrain from imposing your own ideas. It is an approach that helped me both in my academic thought and my social interactions. Again, the WC is about asking the multi-layered questions that get at the gut of an issue and then collaboratively working towards a solution. It is not about putting a band-aid on small imperfections and calling it a day. The WC taught me to use my words sparingly and ask perceptive questions that shift the focus onto the other person. It becomes an even better strategy when communicating with people with differing viewpoints. On the other side, if I am grappling with a theory, I want to get straight to the core rather than conflate symptoms with root causes. I think the world may be a simpler and better place if we all tried to internalize that lesson.
What do you recommend about the Writing Center to other students?

I always tell people that writing is first and foremost a form of communication. Powerful writing evokes something in the reader, and the skilled writer will be able to wield prose in such a way as to create a spectrum of impact on his/her reader. Having said that, writing as a two-way street oftentimes presents itself as quite a hurdle for college-level writers. But at the WC, students have an incredible resource in testing their ideas and writing out on another person. Whether it’s a challenging poem or a lab report, you want to make sure you are bringing your reader along with you and holding his/her hand... it’s just the nice thing to do.

Also, believe in the power of free-writing! When in doubt, write it out. The WC gives students a judgement-free space with sunshine streaming in through stain-glass windows, vaulted ceilings that accommodate pretty creative heights, and couches just uncomfortable enough to keep you from falling asleep.

What are you doing now?

I am currently an Assistant Dean of Admission at Franklin and Marshall College. After experiencing F&M as a student, it has been fascinating to work in higher education and see the behind-the-scenes makings of a small liberal arts college. I travel to high schools across the country, talk with students, and tell them about F&M. This year was particularly exciting because F&M received a record of over 7,100 applications—a tremendous amount for any small liberal arts school.

What do you see happening in your near future?

Next fall, I am planning to apply to Anthropology PhD programs. I fell in love with the field and methodology after completing my honors thesis under Professor Misty Bastian, who very graciously walked me through the process of writing an ethnography. I researched female sexuality in Evangelicalism and sought to capture the voice of the young Evangelical woman, an object — rarely the subject — of constant discourse. I met fourteen incredible young women through the experience who shared with me their journeys of navigating Biblical Womanhood. Soon, fingers-crossed, I will be a stressed-out, caffeine-addicted, Foucault-quoting grad student in the near future. Nothing would make me happier.
Do you have a paper from a Foundations course?

Submit it for consideration in the Whitesell Competition!

All you need to do is schedule an appointment to work on at the Writing Center!

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First Prize is $250
Honorable Mentions are $75

The deadline is fast approaching—Friday, March 13th!

Come in and submit your paper before Spring Break!
Active Voice Committee:
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Steven Viera ’16, Editor
Victoria Harris ’16
Katie Machen ’15

Ibrahim Kamara ’15, Contributing Writer
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Layout and design by Steven Viera ’16

Writing Center Hours
Sundays: 7:00-10:00pm
Mondays: 9:00-12:00 pm; 1:00-4:00 pm; 7:00-10:00 pm
Tuesdays: 9:00-12:00 pm; 1:00-4:00 pm; 7:00-10:00 pm
Wednesdays: 9:00-12:00 pm; 1:00-4:00 pm; 7:00-10:00 pm
Thursdays: 9:00-11:30 pm; 1:00-4:30 pm; 7:00-10:00 pm
Fridays: 9:00-12:00 pm

Writing Assistants
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Oyere Etta ’15 [Joint Studies, Minor FRN]
Zach Fried ’15 [BOS and MUS]
Rhya Ghose ’15 [Joint Studies: PSY/PBH]
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Victoria (Tori) Harris ’16 [CLS]
Ibrahim Kamara ’15 [SPA and GOV]
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