

**NEW MEXICO HIGHLANDS UNIVERSITY
WRITING CENTER**

YEAR-END REPORT

FALL 2014 & SPRING 2015

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I. GOALS

Our primary goals this year were to maintain the policies and procedures installed by Dr. Hindman last year, while assessing the needs of the Writing Center as we move forward. Since the 2008-2009 school year, five directors have managed the Writing Center, limiting the opportunities for the development of a long-term vision. Dr. Hindman's work in the Writing Center in 2013-14 established a strong foundation for the Writing Center's future. We also began to implement some systems for collecting data about how the Writing Center is being utilized by students and staff.

Dr. Gallegos also used his first year as director to orient himself with writing center theory and research. Although a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, Dr. Gallegos entered the position with limited experience working in writing centers and did not study writing center theory as part of his academic training. With the intention of serving in the role of director for an extended time period, he felt that establishing this base of knowledge was necessary to make informed decisions regarding policies and programs.

II. STAFFING AND BUDGET

Staffing

Employee Positions

The NMHU Writing Center is staffed primarily by English Graduate Assistants (GAs). New graduate students are placed in the Writing Center for their first semester before they move into teaching first-year composition courses in their second semester. Departmental Students, Temporary Technician, and Federal Work Study positions constitute the remaining positions. Departmental students are graduate students who are not supported through an assistantship or who are working extra hours beyond the assistantship. Temporary Technician positions are awarded to academic professionals with credentials in writing instruction, and consist of tutors who have already earned MAs in English. Front desk staff are funded through Federal Work Study and are not directly paid from the Writing Center budget.

In Fall 2014, the Writing Center was staffed by one undergraduate Federal Work Study at the front desk, five first-year GAs, one Departmental Student, and one Temporary Technician. In Spring 2015, the Writing Center was staffed by one undergraduate Federal Work Study at the front desk, two first-year GAs, two Departmental Students and two Temporary Technicians. In Summer 2015, the Writing Center was staffed by two GAs. The director also worked three hours per week each semester as a tutor. These hours were primarily worked when tutors had scheduled classes.

Previous Writing Center reports indicated there were not enough tutors and front desk staff to cover necessary operating hours. In 2014-2015, we were able to staff the Writing Center with at least one tutor during all of our operating hours. However, it is difficult to maintain a balanced schedule with an equal number of tutors available at all times because of time conflicts with courses. When these conflicts arose, the Writing Center was staffed by Temporary Technicians and the Director of the Writing Center

Graduate Teaching Assistants

It is impossible to predict how many English graduate teaching assistants will be available as tutors from one semester to the next because this depends on the number of graduate students awarded assistantships, their academic progress, and the number of composition classes available in which they can serve as instructors. However, we can typically count on at least one English graduate teaching assistant per semester (fall and spring) for twelve hours of tutoring in the fall and fifteen hours of tutoring in the spring (the three-hour difference is due to the hours graduates will spend observing composition/English classes their first semester in the program). Fall tutors consist of first-semester graduate assistants and graduate students, with between 5-7 tutors working in the Writing Center. However, the number of spring tutors is largely dependent on enrollment in composition courses.

Budget

The budget in Temporary Technicians for the Writing Center, which provides funds for the fall, spring, and summer terms, is currently \$12,000. This allows us to hire 5-6 tutors working ten hour contracts. Tutors who are graduate students are paid \$14.00 per hour, and tutors with an M.A. are paid \$15.00 per hour. This hourly pay rate is justified by the level of education and skills required for the position.

III. ACTIVITIES

Operating Hours

In the fall, the Writing Center was open from 10-6 on Monday-Thursday and 10-2 on Friday. During the spring, we were open from 9-6 on Monday-Thursday and 9-2 on Friday.

Semester Orientations

The Writing Center held a two-hour long orientation at the beginning of each semester. During these orientations, we discussed Writing Center policies, philosophies and practices, staff scheduling, and other administrative matters.

Quality of Tutoring Sessions

Session Reports

In the previous year's report, it was noted that the quality of tutoring sessions could not be verified due to the inability to collect anonymous data. Dr. Hindman developed and instituted the practice of preparing a session report at the end of each tutoring session. Tutors emailed completed session reports to the Writing Center front desk, where the front desk personnel saved the files, resulting in a double back-up system.

Because the session reports are narrative in nature and each consultant has their own narrative style, it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the overall story that these reports tell about the quality of sessions throughout the year. Because the session reports only present the tutor's perspective regarding the session, there is need for an evaluation system that includes multiple methods for gathering data.

We continued to employ the session report as a way to document tutoring sessions. These sessions represent the tutor's perspective on the session and do not necessarily reflect the quality of the session or the student's perspective. Moving into the 2015-16 year, the Writing Center will continue using the session reports, but we will also implement additional forms of assessment, including peer critique, direct observation by the director, student surveys, and a final end of semester reflective statement composed by the tutor.

"No Stamp" Policy

On strong recommendation from the Director of Composition, and in line with research on Writing Center best practices, Dr. Hindman enacted a "no stamp" policy at the beginning of the Fall semester. In the past, students had come to the Writing Center to get a "stamp" on their papers to "prove" to their professors that they had gone to the Writing Center for help. In practice, students who came to the Writing Center for a stamp would not stay for the entire session length and would not fully participate in the session. It is possible that the "no stamp" policy has meant that fewer students have made appointments at the Writing Center. We cannot make any definite statement on whether this policy impacted the quality of tutoring sessions or on the number of students making tutoring appointments.

For those students required to visit the Writing Center by a professor or instructor, the Writing Center provides a Student Reflection form. The form included spaces for date and time of the session, the name of the tutor, a summary of the session, and a reflection on the session. This helps us achieve our goal of encouraging students to engage in meta-cognitive writing.

Online Tutoring Initiative

Dr. Donna Woodford-Gormley, former Director of the Writing Center, implemented the Writing Center's Online Tutoring Initiative during the 2009-2010 school year. However, this program was discontinued during the 2012-2013 school year due to technical concerns and was reinstated in the last two years. In 2014-2015, online tutoring was underutilized for two reasons. First, the director lacked a clear line of communication to those at the centers who could promote our services. Second, technical problems, as well as student apprehension, seemed to limit our effectiveness. Some students lacked reliable internet service, seemed apprehensive about using the computer program, or did not own a headset. We provided tutoring via phone line to some students who were uncomfortable with the technology. However, this was problematic as the only phone in the Writing Center is located at the front desk. Front desk staff were unable to adequately complete their tasks when the tutor was on the phone. The Writing Center will not be offering phone sessions this year.

Promoting the Writing Center's online services stands as one the director's primary goals in the 2015-16 year. The director will be working with Sharon Doom, Student Center Education Specialist at NMHU's Farmington Center, and Thomasina Ortiz-Gallegos, the Center Director for the Santa Fe Center, to promote our online services. However, we still need to establish connections at the other centers.

Workshops

Continuing with last year's focus on individual tutoring, the Writing Center only presented four in-class workshops last year, all of them focused on APA citation style. Two of these were conducted on-line by the director and the other two were presented in classrooms. One of these workshops

was conducted as a “substitute day,” and the faculty member was not present during the workshop. Despite spending a number of hours preparing a digital presentation, the tutor was not able to access the locked computer in the classroom. The tutor adapted to the situation but was unable to offer the thorough presentation that she had planned. In addition, because the faculty member was not present, the tutor felt that the students were not attentive.

We will continue to promote our workshops this year, but we doubt the effectiveness of providing them when the instructor is not present, and we are considering not offering that as an option.

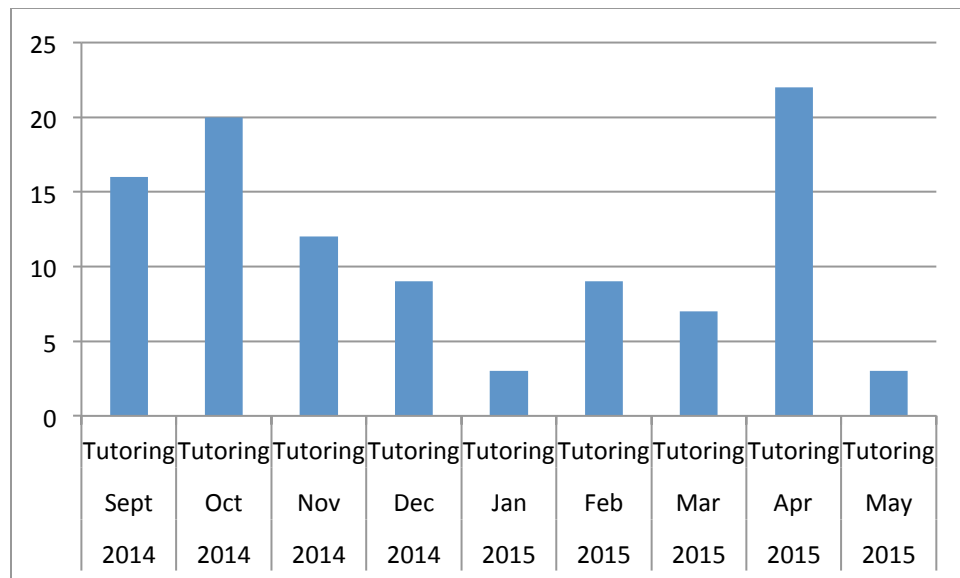
IV. Data Collection

One of the prevailing concerns in Writing Center reports over the last few years is the lack of a system to gather information regarding the students we serve. Due to the work of Dr. Hindman, the Writing Center installed two new computers with HU Lab Tracker. HU Lab Tracker is a computer program that allows students to sign-in to the Writing Center with their student ID or NMHU username. In addition to the Lab Tracker, the Writing Center keeps an appointment book for individual tutoring sessions and a schedule for reserving the lab. The appointment book consists of a printed schedule with space for students to enter their names in the time slots when they want to meet with a tutor. It is kept in a binder at the front desk. The computer lab schedule is maintained using the Outlook calendar.

Although we gathered some data regarding student use of the Writing Center, some of the data is not reliable. For example, a comparison of tutoring sessions recorded in the appointment book and the data from Lab Tracker shows a significant disparity. This disparity implies that front desk staff and tutors were not reminding students to sign in to Lab Tracker.

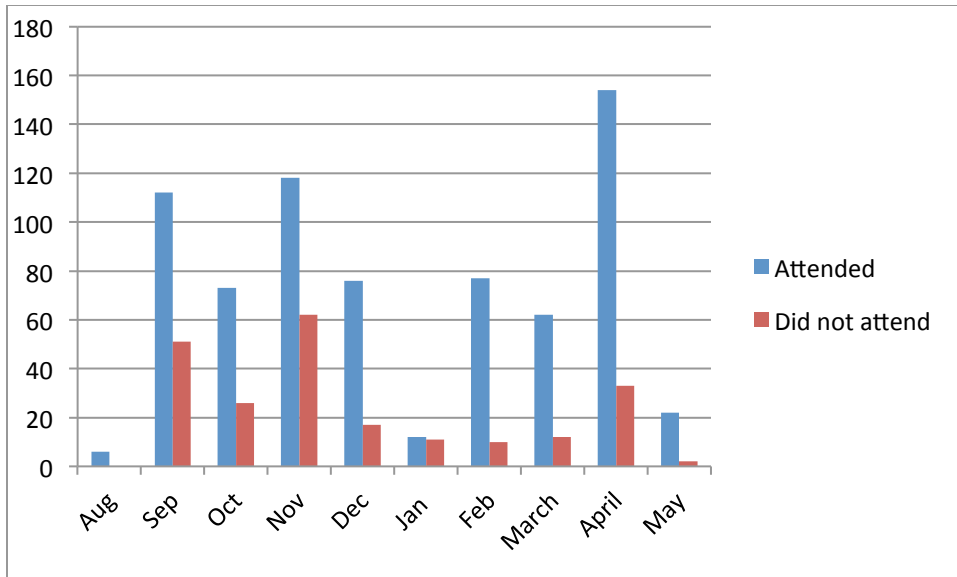
Tutoring

Tutoring Sessions
Data Gathered from Lab Tracker



Tutoring Sessions

Appointments Attended and Not Attended by Students Data Gathered from Appointment Book

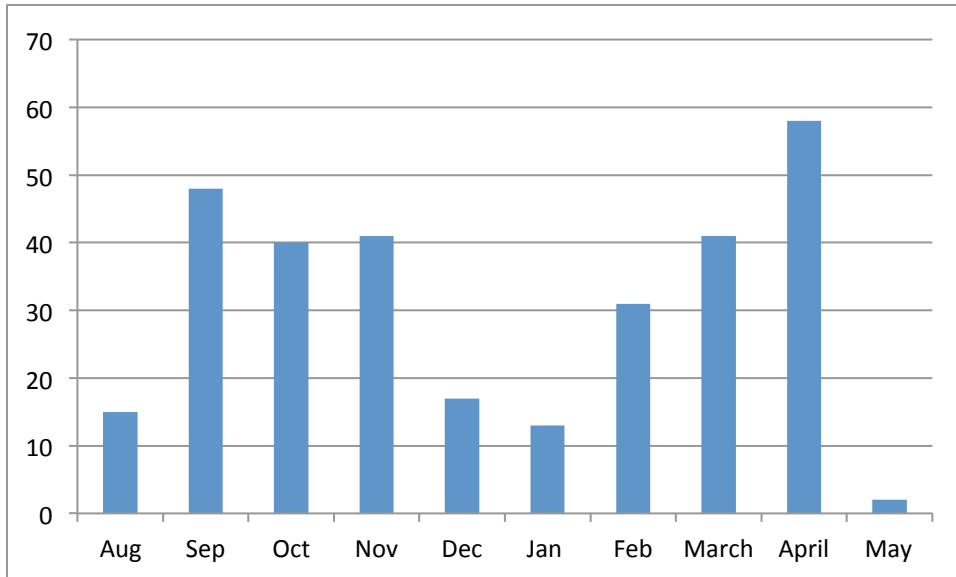


930 students signed-up for a tutoring session last year with 706 attending sessions. Because we have no previous data with which to compare these numbers, it is difficult to provide analysis regarding a 76% attendance rate. As might be expected, we see elevated attendance during busy times of the semester, particularly the last few weeks of the semester. We did not record whether we had to turn away any students at these particular times because we did not have tutors available. Although it would be beneficial to provide additional hours during busy times of the semester, doing so would be difficult because the Writing Center is staffed by students, who also have academic obligations.

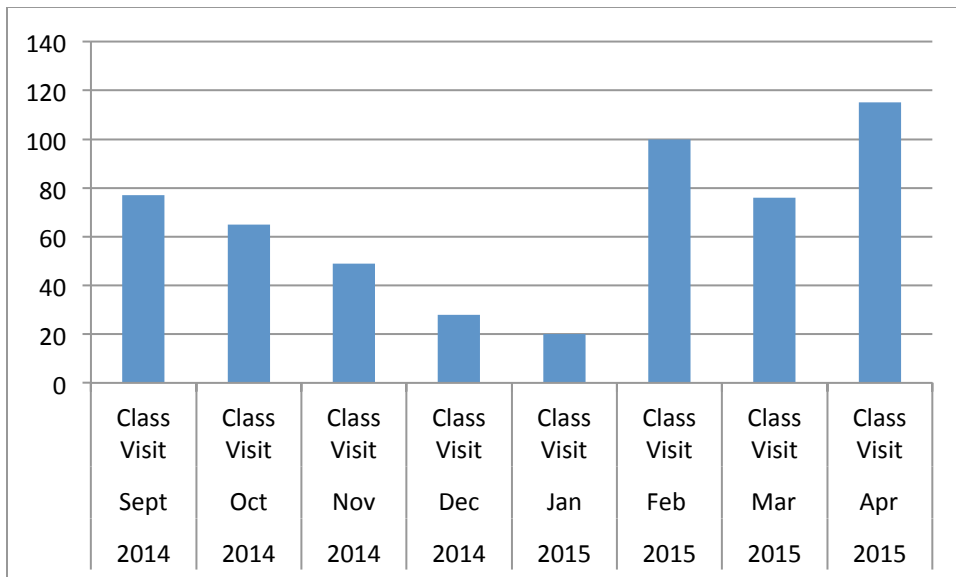
The large disparity between the data collected in Lab Tracker and the appointment book again shows that students were not regularly signing in to Lab Tracker. For example, Lab Tracker data recorded 22 students signing in for tutoring session in April; however, we have 154 attended appointments listed in our appointment book.

Computer Lab for Class Use

Classes Using the Lab
Data Gathered from Outlook Schedule



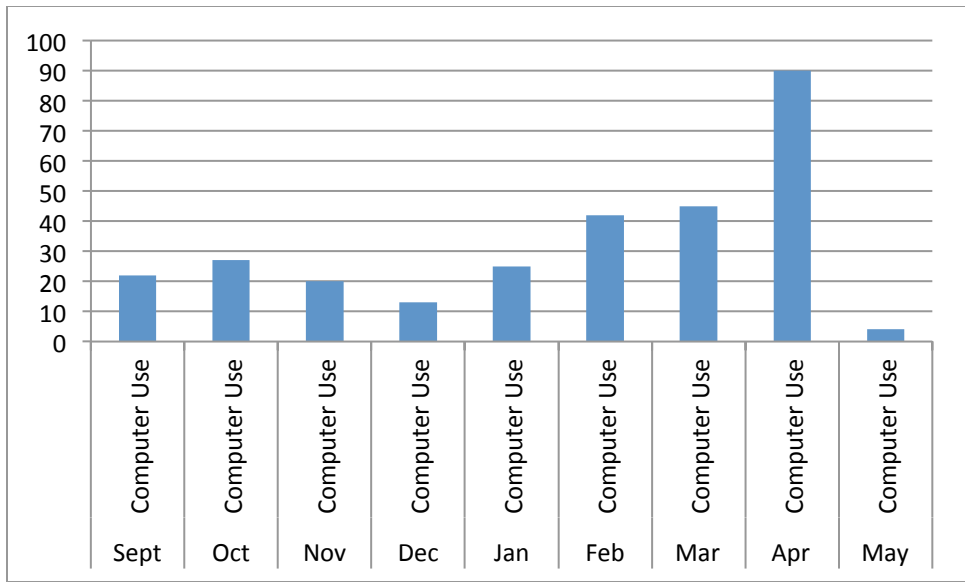
Students Using the Lab with Class
Data Gathered from Lab Tracker



The Writing Center computer lab served as a useful resource for English instructors. The lab consists of two desktop computers and a teaching station with a desktop, a digital projector, and a smart board. We did not formally ask instructors to disclose how they used the lab, but we do know that it was used for research and in-class writing. We did not consistently record which course reserved the lab. Comparing the data also shows that students were not signing into Lab Tracker

when they were visiting their lab with their instructor. In April, for example, 58 classes used the lab, but only 115 signed in, which averages to 2 students signing in per class. It seems that some classes were signing in, while others were not.

Students Using the Lab Individually
Data Gathered from Lab Tracker



When the lab was not being used by classes, students were able to use the Writing Center lab. According to Lab Tracker data, 288 students used the lab. However, these numbers probably do not reflect the number of students using the lab, as it is clear by looking at other data that students were not consistently signing in to Lab Tracker. Due to a limited supply budget, the Writing Center does not provide printing services to students using the lab individually. We do allow classes and students being tutors to print.

Conclusion

The most evident concern with our data concerns the reliability of our data. It is clear that students were not signing in to Lab Tracker, and that front desk staff and tutors did not consistently remind students to sign in. We did not begin the school year with Lab Tracker in the Writing Center, but the sign-in policy was explained to the Writing Center staff. The importance of using Lab Tracker was explained at the Fall 2015 orientation, but the director will regularly compare the available data to determine whether staff is following the policy. We have also placed typed reminders on each computer in the lab and have communicated our policy to instructors.

In addition, reviews of Writing Center data collection practices from other universities have shown that it is standard practice for Writing Centers to collect demographic and academic data. We will be collecting this data for students who are being tutored in the 2015-16 school year. This data includes basic information such as ethnicity and gender, and academic information, such as majors and standing. This data can help us target areas on campus to increase promotion and develop supplemental support programs like workshops.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND GOALS

Looking forward to the 2015-16 school year, the Writing Center hopes to accomplish three goals:

- We will institute new data collection methods that will ensure more reliable results and a better understanding of the students we serve.
- We will establish stronger relationships with center administrators, who can help us promote our online tutoring services.
- We will develop and implement a tutor evaluation system that includes a pre-scheduled observation by the director, peer evaluation, and an end of the semester reflection.

Data Collection

Although we have made some progress in collecting data, it is clear that our current system does not produce the reliable information that we need. We have already implemented new procedures for collecting data. We have started to maintain a file for each student that we tutor. This file consists of a First Consultation Information form, the tutor's sessions report, and the student's post-sessions reflection. Students are also asked to complete a short survey about the session and the tutor.

Online Tutoring

The director views the development of the online tutoring initiative as a long-term project. Our specific goal this year is to develop relationships with those individuals in the centers who are in positions to promote our services.

Tutor Evaluation

There is not an established method for evaluating tutors, with informal observations and session reports serving as the primary tools for evaluation. The Writing Center serves a dual purpose of serving the larger campus community, while also providing professional development opportunities for English graduate students. These evaluations attend to both of these goals.

In the long-term, the Writing Center must engage some pressing concerns beyond those of data collection, online tutoring, and evaluation. Of primary importance is our role serving Latino/a students and first-generation students. Research on writing centers and Latino/a students is scarce, practically nonexistent, with some researchers questioning the effectiveness of mainstream writing center pedagogies when employed with Latino/a students. Our position at a Hispanic-Serving Institution requires us to question traditional approaches because we are not serving a traditional student population. Even the process of promoting our services becomes complicated when we recognize that it is not simply a matter of posting flyers with our hours around campus, but that we are engaging a student population in Latino/as in general who do not take full advantage of the support services available to them, who often have family obligations and jobs, and who enter the institution with a sense of linguistic inadequacy because they speak nonstandard forms of English, such as Spanglish. Because of our student population, we need to see the development of the Writing Center as an extended process that is limited by our resources, especially the limits placed on the director by a one-course per semester course release, where the management of writing support for undergraduate and graduate students on campus and at four centers across the state is reduced to the time preparing for and teaching a single class each semester.