

University of Central Missouri

# Writing Center

## 2015-2016 Annual Report

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Since 1969, the Writing Center has offered one-on-one writing instruction to University of Central Missouri students. Though the Writing Center has taken many forms and names over the decades, it remains committed to creating a learning environment that empowers student writers and welcomes them into the academic discourse community. Toward that end, the Writing Center acknowledges writing as a recursive, personalized process. Our goal, then, is not to improve students' papers, but rather to support students as they explore various writing strategies, contexts, and topics. We hope that our first annual report will offer our colleagues a glimpse into the Writing Center's services, staff, and practices that support an average of 1,000 student writers each semester.

Together, we will build a community of writers.

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Compiled and written by Heather Hughes

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## A Letter From Diana Gladfelter, Director



The following first annual report is evidence of the work the University of Central Missouri Writing Center is involved in on campus. We have made many changes during the 2015-2016 school year: I became the new director; we added a professional consultant position, essentially the right hand of the director; we increased our outreach to the campus community with workshops and presentations to classes, and we moved to a new location in the Learning Commons on the third floor of the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at the end of the school year.

During our school year at Humphreys, twelve tutors (eleven undergraduate and one graduate) handled 7579 face-to-face sessions and appointments. This does include Online Writing Lab (OWL) sessions we also handled, but it does not include the Adobe Connect synchronous sessions with the Summit Center in Lee's Summit. Indeed, we were very busy. Sometimes, during slow periods, we would sit at our favorite table and discuss any issue that might come up, some from the papers we were reading, others from our own research or some social issue. As we talked and discussed, students in the Writing Center would enter into the conversation, adding insights and ideas. This is what writing centers are about, sharing and discussing ideas, arguing points, and gaining new insights. Then we scurry off to write and reflect and share again. We hope you will feel free to stop by and see the important work of the Writing Center and share in our conversations.

I am writing this from my new space in the JCK Library, where I can look out into the vast space of the Learning Commons, which is shared with the Academic Support Center. We have never had this much space, and we struggle to adjust to our new enlarged locale. However, as we are putting things in place, we have begun to imagine what we can do. Stop by and see our new place and join us at our table.

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## A Letter From Heather Hughes, Professional Consultant



The 2015-2016 academic year brought many changes to the University of Central Missouri Writing Center. Along with the Department of Academic Enrichment, the Writing Center joined the College of Education and welcomed Christopher Stockdale as department chair. Diana Gladfelter stepped into the role of Writing Center Director. I joined the Writing Center keenly aware of my role as a new leader in a close-knit community at the cusp of change.

However, the talk of transformation drifting across campus seemed serendipitous for all these challenges and opportunities. In the spring of 2016, I took part in the Department of Academic Enrichment's book club and symposium inspired by Charity Johansson and Peter Felton's *Transforming Students: Fulfilling the Promise of Higher Education*. Around the same time, I joined the Department of Women and Gender Studies for a teaching workshop featuring Dr. AnaLouise Keating, author of *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues* and *Transformation Now: Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*. Since 2014, the College of Education has embraced a Transformational Learning Initiative with the goal of "altering the teaching-learning environment to be more powerful and engaging" through technological integration. Despite their political and pedagogical differences, all these authors, speakers, and educators emphasize the difference between "change" and "transformation." Transformation, according to Johansson and Felton, requires purpose and self-reflection (2014).

As I write this letter, I sit amid a stack of boxes destined for the Writing Center's new location in the Learning Commons in the JCK Library. This change of place offers an opportunity to re-imagine the Writing Center as part of a centralized community of student services. It invites our community to take stock of the Writing Center's contributions and accomplishments over the past 40 years. Thus, in the spirit of self-reflection and purposeful action that distinguishes transformation from tumultuous change, the Writing Center's first annual report offers a glimpse into our history, current projects, and future aspirations.

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## **Mission Statement**

The primary purpose of the Writing Center is to guide students to become better writers in the university setting. Writing Center consultants are interested in helping students develop skills and acquire knowledge to foster their independence as writers capable of editing their own texts. Whether instruction takes place on the premises of the Center or through its online service, the emphasis is on teaching students rather than proofreading or "fixing" papers. To this end, Writing Center consultants make every effort to ensure that tutorial sessions are directed at least as much by the student's questions and input as by the instructor's suggestions, and that writers are invested with ultimate ownership of and responsibility for their own texts, as well as confidence in their ability to meet the standards of the academic discourse community.

Consultants in the Writing Center will help students achieve the following outcomes:

- Identify and analyze the rhetorical context to articulate a clear purpose for writing.
- Strengthen their writing skills.
- Strategically apply particular writing processes and techniques to enhance their personal style.
- Appropriately document any sources they have used.

## **A Note on Grammar**

After comparing teacher-marked errors in contemporary student writing with similar records from 1917, 1930, and 1986, Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) found that "the rate of error per 100 words (i.e., 2.299) remains almost exactly the same as it has been during the last century" (p. 800). While the rate of formal errors remains stable, the length and type of writing assigned to students has shifted dramatically. Today's students write longer, more complex papers that emphasize argumentation, research, and critical thinking (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). With these contexts in mind, the Writing Center prioritizes content over commas and global concerns over local, sentence-level errors. The Writing Center affirms that errors are a natural part of the writing process. In other words, writing centers exist not because students "cannot write," but because they do.



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## Writing Center History

*with gratitude for AE historian, Mary Alice Lyon*



Under different names and in different locations, the UCM Writing Center has provided supplemental writing instruction for students for nearly 50 years. In 1969, writing assistance was relocated from the English Department to the newly launched Learning Center. Over the following decade, the embryonic writing center earned its first name, the Writing Lab, and its first full-time instructor. Ginger Young headed the program from 1975 to 2000. In 1985, the

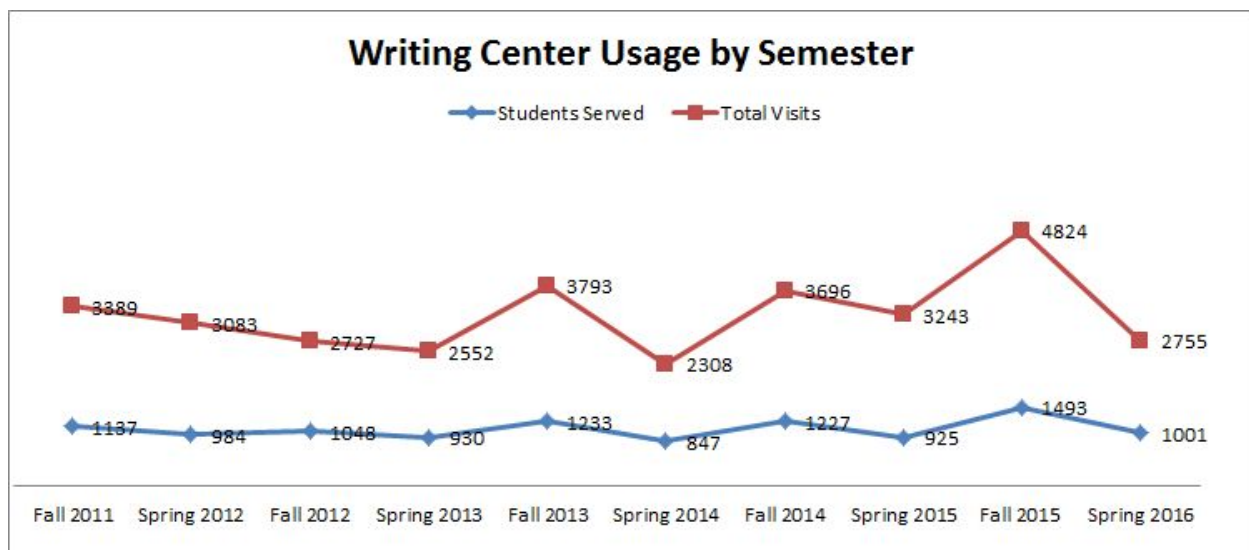
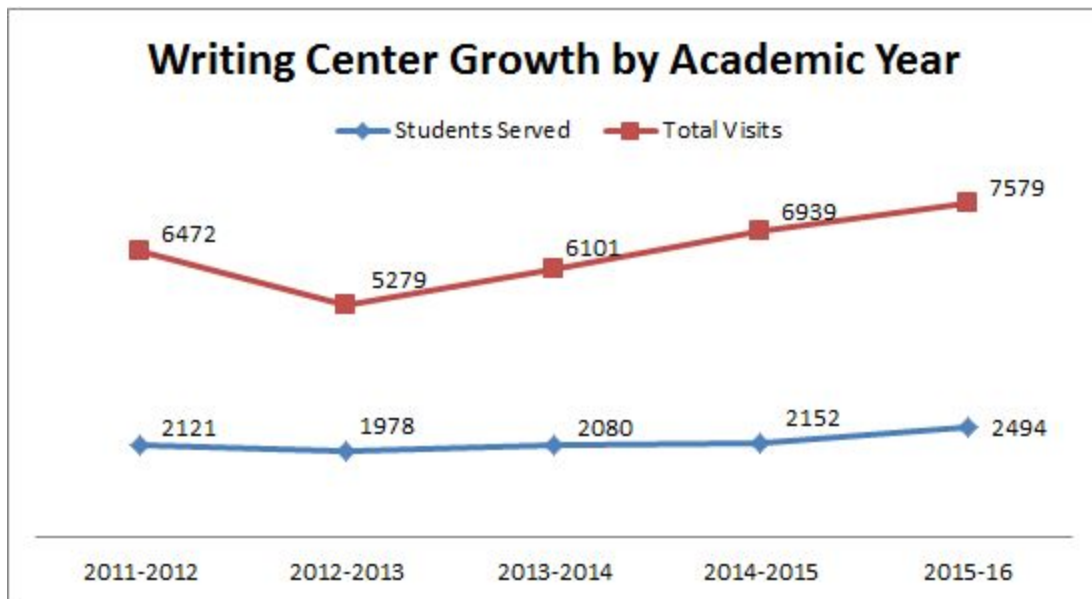
Writing Lab separated from the Learning Center and the following year was rehoused in the Self-Instruction Center in the Ward Edwards Library. There student writers gained access to a computer lab for the first time. Over the following years, the Writing Lab relocated several times. It also adopted the name Writing Center in the late eighties. In 1998, the Online Writing Lab (OWL) took flight to provide Writing Center access to students off campus. In 2000, Davie Davis headed the Writing Center and along with Tony Shaffer, began to use student tutors. With coffee and conversation, this model of a supportive, student-centered space has continued to this day. In fall 2015, Diana Gladfelter stepped in as director, and in the final weeks of the spring semester, the Writing Center relocated to the Learning Commons in the James C. Kirkpatrick Library.

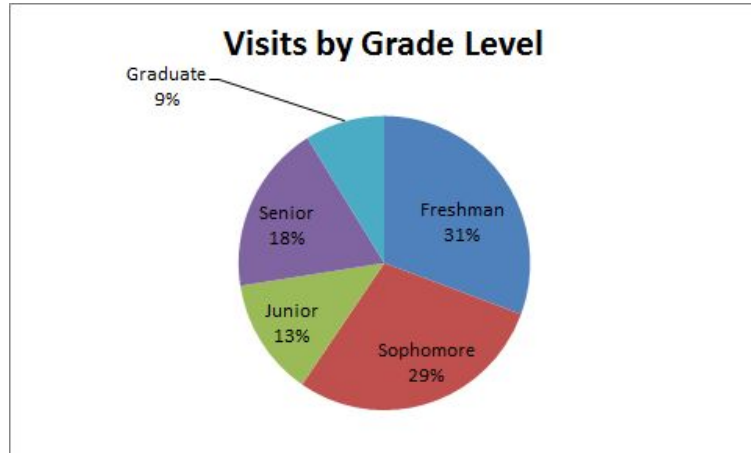


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## Writing Center Growth

The 2015-2016 academic year continued the Writing Center's history of growth and expansion. Fall 2015 was a record-breaking semester as our team of twelve tutors facilitated 4,824 sessions for 1,493 individual students.





## Student Writing Needs

In a 2013 survey, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that incoming freshmen at the University of Central Missouri expressed more doubt about their writing abilities than their

counterparts at comparable institutions. More than 20% of UCM freshmen described their writing abilities as below average compared with only 14.3% of freshmen at other universities. Similarly, a greater number of UCM freshmen (20.7%) predicted they would need tutoring or remedial work in English. Among students of all skill-levels, 44.1% of incoming UCM freshmen reported that they frequently sought feedback on their academic work. Freshmen make up 31% of all UCM Writing Center visitors. Thus, the Writing Center provides a desired service for students who seek writing support and study space during their first year experience.





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## Student Voices

"The Writing Center is awesome: when I get here am greeted with great smiles and asked what they could help me [with] today. I have problems with my writing, and the staff will ask how I would like to rewrite the sentence and explain how I could make it better. If there were no Writing Center, I think I would have been miserable because I have questions and when I visit, I can get help and have less stress."

"I have submitted several papers this semester, and one of the last tutors wanted to give me space to make my own corrections. I really like this because it allowed me to make the corrections with guidance. Therefore, I learned more, I think."

"Thank you so much for your time, and I appreciate your comment about my story. I am excited to have received the handout as well. It is going to be my go-to file when writing an essay."



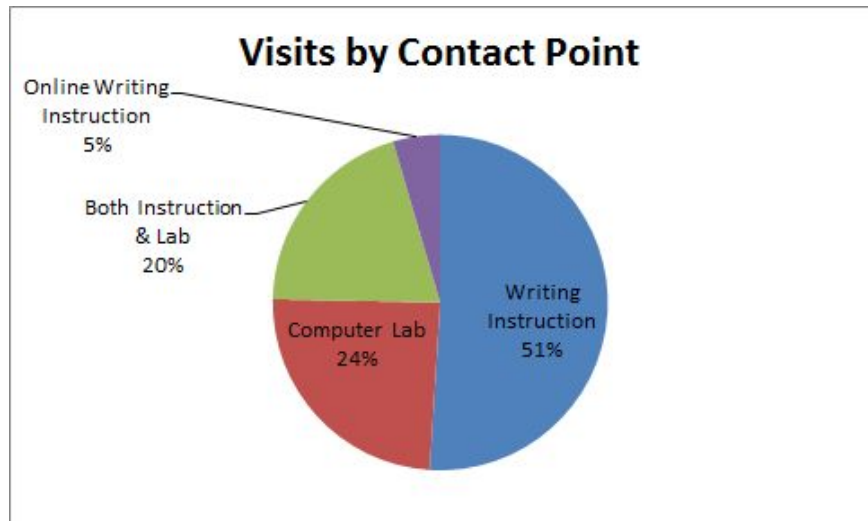
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## Writing Center Services

On the UCM campus, the Writing Center offers **one-on-one writing instruction** with undergraduate peer tutors. Sessions typically last 20 minutes to an hour depending on the length and nature of the assignment. Our main location (located in



Humphreys 114 & 116 during the 2015-2016 academic year) also houses a **computer lab** where students can write, research, and print. About a quarter of students make use of both services in a single visit. Some seek input on their writing or guidance with formatting while working at the computer. Others begin a session with a consultant after completing their draft and then return to the computer to incorporate feedback.

Students may also access the Writing Center through the **Online Writing Lab (OWL)**. These sessions take place asynchronously through e-mail. Students are asked to include a description of the assignment and three guiding questions along with their paper. Papers are reviewed during standard business hours with a response time of 2-4 days.

Students from the Lee's Summit campus may connect with the Writing Center through **Adobe Connect**. This platform provides synchronous tutoring that enables student and tutor to communicate through both audio and video while interacting with a shared digital document.

The Writing Center has developed **workshops** on citation styles, research, writing processes, personal statements, thesis statements, and other topics. These presentations will be hosted in the Learning Commons throughout the 2016-2017 academic year.

# GRAMMAR HAPPY HOUR

What is a  
sentence  
fragment?

Where does  
the comma  
go?

There?  
Their?  
They're?



**BRING YOUR PAPERS.  
BRING YOUR QUESTIONS.**

**SNAG THE ANSWERS.  
SNAG SOME SNACKS**

as you work with tutors to master academic writing.

**EVERY WEDNESDAY FROM 3-5  
@ THE WRITING CENTER**

## New Projects and Programs: Grammar Happy Hour

In the fall of 2015, The UCM Writing Center launched **Grammar Happy Hour** as an informal, student-centered space for grammar instruction and discussion. Grammar Happy Hour aims to create a middle-ground between remedial grammar instruction (that relies on prescriptive drills) and hands-off approaches (that leave students to independently search out the information they “should already know”). Through small-group instruction, Grammar Happy Hour creates space for grammar-intensive

tutoring sessions as a complement and follow-up to the typical tutoring session.

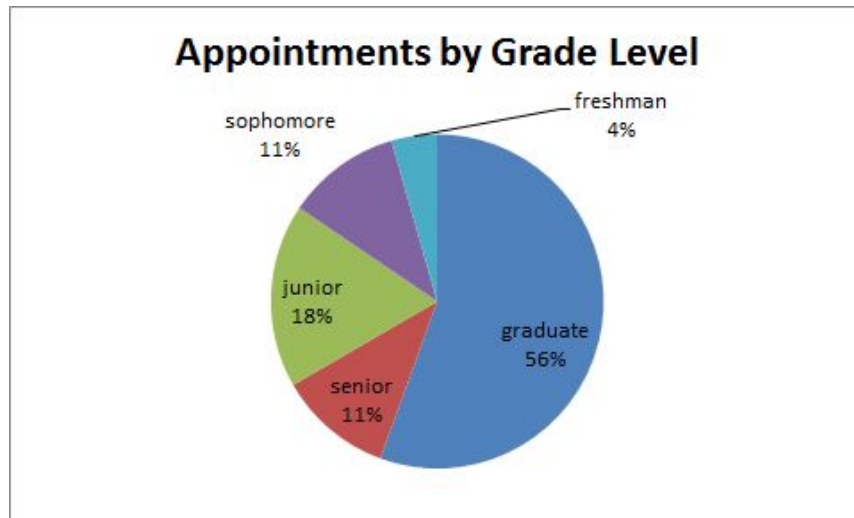
## New Projects and Programs: Appointments

Though historically a walk-in only service, the Writing Center began offering limited **appointments** in March 2016. By offering students the option of scheduling appointments, the Writing Center hopes to better serve distance learners and non-traditional students with limited access to campus. Appointments also offer graduate students an opportunity to book longer sessions.

Students scheduled 47 appointments between the appointment program's launch on March 1st and May 13th. Students primarily self-scheduled their appointments via Google calendar though some scheduled their appointments over the phone or at the

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front desk. Only 65% of students attended their scheduled appointment. While the Writing Center clearly aims to improve attendance rates, it is worth noting that only 3 students made up almost half of those absences. Thus, most students attended their appointments, but a handful of students habitually scheduled and then did not attend.



Moving forward, students who miss three or more appointments will be redirected to our walk-in services.

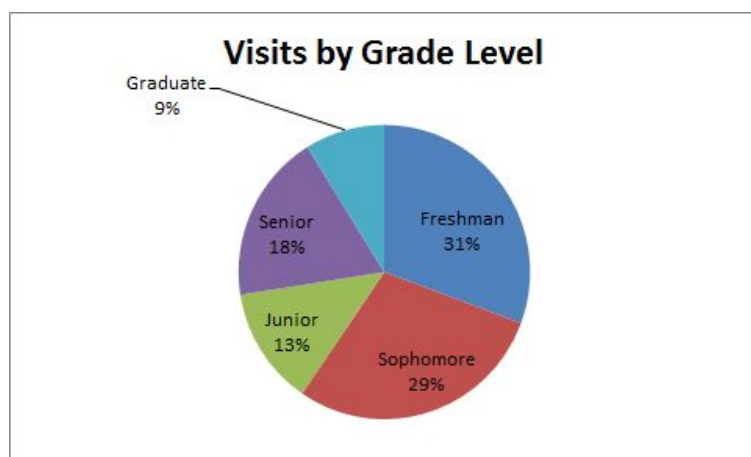
Graduate students, to whom appointments were promoted via graduate advisors, constituted 56% of the scheduled appointments despite

making up only 9% of the total Writing Center population. Furthermore, 85% of all appointments were scheduled by graduate students and upperclassmen, thereby revealing a need to provide increased support for upper level students working within their disciplines.

## **New Projects and Programs: Satellite Locations**

Fall 2015 saw the launch of a Writing Center satellite sponsored by the Honors College and located in the Houts-Hosey West Campus Resource Lounge. The location offered additional evening writing support to all UCM students. The satellite was staffed by two Writing Center consultants who are also part of the Honors College.

In preparation for the move to the Learning Commons, the Writing Center established a second satellite location in the JCK Library during the spring of 2016. Like the Honors College satellite, this location offered additional evening hours during which students could connect with a Writing Center consultant. The satellite also provided an opportunity to connect with the Learning Commons staff and tutors in preparation for our official partnership.



### Expanded Program: Online Writing Lab

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 27.1% of undergraduate students and 30.8% of postbaccalaureate students were enrolled in distance learning

courses in 2013. UCM Task Force 5, a committee to design and implement enhanced academic support services for all students, found that UCM currently enrolls 858 fully online students and roughly 5,000 students taking at least one online course. Though the Writing Center has offered an **Online Writing Lab (OWL)** since 1998, spring 2016 initiated an overhaul of the OWL to better align the Writing Center's online services with the the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (2013) "A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)."

To this end, the Writing Center utilizes problem-centered, text-based online instruction modeled on Hewett's (2011) mini-lesson method:

- Strategically identify the writing concept or problem to address during the session.
- Use and/or define level-appropriate vocabulary that communicates the writing concepts and conventions that will help the student understand the lesson.
- Demonstrate how to revise the problem or apply the writing concept.
- Provide step-by-step tasks for revision which encourage students to apply the demonstrated writing concept. (Hewett, 2011)

Problem-centered instruction that explains, models, and then tasks students with revision best reflects the OWL's role as "sites of interaction and dialogue and not as linear 'drop-off' points to 'fix' papers" (CCCC, 2013, p. 26).



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## Moving Forward: Goals

While transformation calls for careful reflection on past and current events, it also welcomes future aspirations. As the Writing Center settles into its new location, we look forward to fall 2016 as an opportunity to expand and refine our services. In the upcoming academic year, we hope to accomplish the following:

- Partner with the Learning Commons staff to build an effective network of services.
- Provide additional professional development and training opportunities for Writing Center consultants.
- Expand the Writing Center's digital presence to better serve online learners.
- Design interactive workshops, talks, and events such as
  - Grammar Happy Hour
  - Conversation Corner
  - Thesis Bootcamp
- Collaborate with instructors, advisors, administrators, staff, and other campus members to build a community of writers.

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## Information for Instructors

The Writing Center deeply appreciates all the time, effort, and insight faculty contribute to the ongoing cultivation of a community of writers on the UCM campus. With that shared goal in mind, we offer the following suggestions for effective Writing Center and classroom collaboration.

- Schedule an **informational presentation** to introduce students to the Writing Center. A member of the Writing Center staff can visit your classroom and give a short presentation on our services. You may schedule a presentation on our blog <http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/classroom-presentations.html>
- **Incentivize** rather than require Writing Center visits. While required visits have the advantage of introducing students to our services, they also place tremendous pressure on our small staff. A number of instructors across campus have found creative ways to motivate students to use the Writing Center. Some offer extra credit while others give students full points in the “mechanics/grammar” section of their rubric. Extended due dates or additional rewrite opportunities may also motivate students to submit Writing Center reviewed drafts. If you require your classes to visit the Writing Center, please consider staggering the due dates if you teach multiple sections of a course.
- **Emphasize** to students that the Writing Center is a collaborative workspace rather than an editing service. If you refer students to the Writing Center, help them develop 2-3 guiding questions, writing goals, or areas of concern. This allows students to maintain ownership of their work while seeking feedback and allows the writing consultant to focus the session on the student’s particular needs.
- **Let us know how we can help.** The Writing Center strives to support and celebrate writing across the curriculum. We welcome opportunities to collaborate and learn.
- **Update syllabi** to direct students to the Writing Center’s new location on the third floor of the JCK Library in the Learning Commons, Room 3160.

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## A Compendium of Writing Center Resources

Official Website: <https://www.ucmo.edu/ae/writing/>

Find updates, resources, and articles on our blog: <http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/>

Book an **appointment** at <http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/appointments.htm>

View resources for **instructors** at <http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/for-instructors.html>

Schedule an **informational presentation** for your classroom:

<http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/classroom-presentations.html>

View resources for **students** at <http://ucmwriting.weebly.com/for-students.html>

Read a detailed guide to **OWL submissions**: [www.ucmo.edu/ae/writing/owl.cfm](http://www.ucmo.edu/ae/writing/owl.cfm)

View a powerpoint on **OWL submissions**--or upload it to your Blackboard classroom at:

<http://tinyurl.com/guqrfwh>

**Email** [writingcenter@ucmo.edu](mailto:writingcenter@ucmo.edu) to submit papers to the OWL or ask a question

Connect with /UcmWritingCenter on **Facebook**

Follow the Writing Center on **Twitter** @UCMwriting

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