

Writing Studio @ FIT
Annual Report
Academic Year 2009-2010

Mission Statement

The Writing Studio is committed to excellence in writing for personal, professional, and pedagogical reasons. The Writing Studio provides student writers with a risk free environment to work on their writing with writing consultants who understand the needs and interests of FIT writers. Writers at FIT find a creative hub for expressing their ideas through practical and artistic means at the Studio.

Because of the kinds of communication demands we face today, the Writing Studio places an emphasis on helping writers become better learners and writers by supporting them through the process of writing. The Writing Studio seeks to focus on each individual writer's process to ensure that they leave the studio with a better understanding of how to create effective texts. The Studio works toward these goals through the peer-tutoring model, which fosters growth for both student writing consultants and writers. Furthermore, the peer-tutoring model makes the Writing Studio a leading example of FIT's commitment to a culture of student-centeredness.

In addition to providing FIT students the best individualized writing support possible, the Writing Studio is also committed to assisting faculty members in everything from incorporating writing into their courses to working with multilingual writers to developing and responding to writing assignments that effectively target the concerns of their courses. Since the Writing Studio is strongly committed to collaboration, building and fostering strong relationships with faculty members across the disciplines and in the various programs offered at FIT is important to us. Such relationships, we hope, will offer us, and our students, the best opportunities for teaching and learning in a cross-curricular effort to strengthen the academic core, especially when writing is used as a medium for these opportunities. The Writing Studio invites faculty and staff to contact us about possibilities for creating writing partnerships that benefit courses and writers at FIT.

Accomplished Goals 2009-2010

Throughout the 2009-2010 academic year, the Writing Studio continued to improve its services and access to the larger FIT community. The Writing Studio set the following six objectives for AY 2009-10:

- Writing Across the Curriculum Initiatives;
- Increase Mainstream Student Visits;
- Grants/Sponsorship;
- Innovative Tutoring;
- Peer Writing Consultant Education and Development;
- Developing the Writing Consultant and Staff Positions.

The Writing Studio made headway in achieving each of these goals and will continue to work toward a few of them with the insight gained from experiences over the past year. The efforts toward these goals are detailed below:

Writing Across the Curriculum Initiatives

The Writing Studio continued working with the faculty from Liberal Arts, Art and Design, Business and Technology, and Graduate studies to enhance the experiences that students have with writing in these schools. The most notable accomplishment was the development of the Writing Studio Liaison program, which allows for individual faculty members from specific departments to help build connections between faculty and the Writing Studio and students and the Writing Studio. The work that Liaisons have done with the Writing Studio includes making decisions on a common documentation style for the department, developing stronger assignments, fostering connections between writing tutors and students, and informing other faculty members about what the Writing Studio can offer their students and their curriculum.

A notable accomplishment this year were workshops with sixth semester fashion design students to develop their philosophy statements for the Council of Fashion Designers of America competition. The Writing Studio created and implemented workshops for these students that helped them articulate their design process and the meaning behind their choices as designers. Faculty from fashion design reported great success in how students communicate their design process and philosophy in addition to winning several awards in the competition.

The Writing Studio also worked with Art and Design faculty on the importance of blogging about art and developing ways to help students learn how to discuss their work in online forums. In fact, the writing tutors have worked to develop guides for students that will help them accomplish such a task. These guides will soon be available on our website.

We continue to work with the graduate program in Exhibition Design, helping their students to write their thesis projects. The lessons we learn from our work with students in this program then make it possible to revise how students are introduced to the writing process in the following year. In addition to strengthening student thesis writing, this process also strengthens the quality of how thesis is taught and discussed in the program. The Writing Studio is already in discussion with the new MFA in Illustration program to make similar efforts in that program.

Another fruitful connection has been with the Career Services and Internship Center. In addition to the work that we had been doing with counselors and faculty at the Internship Center to help student writers with everything from cover letters and résumés to the journals they keep in Internship classes, we embarked on a new series of workshops. The pilot workshop, which was offered on May 5, was on writing cover letters. Over 75 students showed up, and we had to turn students away due to space issues. We are now implementing a series of workshops in the fall that students will be able to register to take.

Finally, working with the CET, the Writing Studio was able to make connections with adjunct faculty across the college addressing how to help English as a Second Language (ESL) learners communicate and write.

All of these activities point toward the relationships that the Writing Studio has been fostering with degree programs, departments, individual faculty members, and student writers across the college. With each initiative, the Studio tries to help faculty develop new and innovative ways to help their students understand writing and to think of themselves as writers within their disciplines.

Increase Mainstream Student Visits

At the end of last academic year, we noticed that a significant number of our visitors were ESL writers. One of our goals was to track these numbers better and to try to communicate to our traditional student population how we can assist them. In the fall of 2009 we found that nearly 80% of our visitors were non-native speakers of English. By the end of the spring 2010 semester, that number had dropped to 52%, meaning there was a 28% increase in the number of native English speakers. What we can discern from this is that the longer the Writing Studio is open, the more likely it is that we will see increasingly diverse student populations.

Grants/Sponsorship

The Writing Studio will come in under budget this year due to the Perkins Grant. The Perkins Grant provided the Writing Studio nearly \$24,000 in funding this year. In an effort to use this grant money more wisely, some of the funds for next year have been allocated to use on purchasing resources and materials in addition to funding staff education initiatives. In addition to the Perkins Grant, the Writing Studio was just awarded \$1,000 in funding by the Student Faculty Corp to run the Language Exchange Program in the upcoming academic year. At this point, the idea of sponsorship was put on hold because of the economic climate. We plan to revisit the possibility of sponsorship in the future.

Innovative Tutoring

The peer and professional writing consultants of FIT enjoy helping students both within and outside the studio. Small groups of tutors often visit classrooms and other functions in order to assist students, graduate students, and faculty. The Writing Studio prioritizes establishing strong relationships with other departments, and these relationships provide opportunities to rethink how to tutor FIT students. For example, a number of tutors interviewed faculty members from different departments and shared their tutoring experiences with these professors. From these interviews, tutors were able to get a better handle on what assignments are about and how to help students meet the expectations of those assignments. On the other hand, the professors got a glimpse into the tutoring process and have a better idea of the concerns his/her students have when they come to the Writing Studio. Thus, our tutoring is not a simple transaction between the student and the tutor but rather a complex relationship between tutors and writers that is enriched by faculty and departmental expectations. Tutoring also makes it easier for faculty to reassess their assignments and the learning relationships they have with their students.

Peer Writing Consultant Education and Development

The single most important part of the Writing Studio's success is its careful attention to Peer Writing Consultant education and development. Several activities happened this year that contributed to the education of peer tutors at FIT.

The Writing Studio collectively engages in various activities for the purpose of professional development and tutor advancement. Bi-monthly practicum meetings are held where the staff reviews recent experiences and discusses upcoming projects, such as business writing workshops and other upcoming initiatives. In addition, the FIT Writing Consultants met with members of the Educational Skills department in order to discuss how to facilitate more productive tutoring sessions. Topics included students with learning disabilities, English Language Learners, and struggling writers in general. All of these activities enriched and refined the experience of the FIT Writing Studio.

Nine FIT writing consultants participated for the first time in The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) in November 2009. Three consultants presented how to work with students in fields that they are not familiar with, such as Toy Design and Fashion Merchandising Management. Four Peer Writing Consultants delivered a presentation about the growing pains of developing a new writing studio. In addition, they attended many presentations from other universities over the course of three days. By hearing the experiences of other tutors, such as the importance of the opening moments of a session, the FIT Writing Consultants reflected on their own methods and gained invaluable knowledge about the practice of peer tutoring.

A small group of Peer Writing Consultants from the University of Vermont (UVM) and the Fashion Institute participated in a tutor exchange over their respective spring breaks. This exchange gave the tutors the opportunity to immerse themselves in an alternate tutoring environment. Each school was able to absorb and apply what they discovered from the other university. The UVM students were impressed with the open space provided by FIT's Writing Studio, as well as the close community within both the writing consultants and the student writers. Subsequently, FIT's Writing Consultants were able to observe tutoring sessions and learned about a new Writing in the Disciplines Program, in which each consultant works with a group of students from a specific course. The writing consultants were able to share their findings and observations with the rest of the staff in order to discuss how we can better serve our students.

Five of the Peer Writing Consultants submitted proposals to present at next year's NCPTW. They have all been invited to present their findings from projects they developed throughout AY2009-2010. One presentation will be on helping artists become better writers while the other presentation will report on the exchange with the University of Vermont. In addition to this scholarly work, four of the peer tutors are working on a manuscript about helping students write artist's statements, which they plan to submit for publication in July.

Together, these initiatives provide FIT Writing Consultants a number of opportunities to fine-tune their skills and abilities as tutors. They not only learn how to be better tutors, but they are also expected to discuss and inform their work as tutors at national conferences. Their on-campus training during practicum sessions allows them to test best practices, to discover new techniques, and to consider the needs of the kinds of writers we meet at FIT. In addition, FIT writing tutors are encouraged to have a broader view of the issues facing young writers at most colleges and universities.

Through their development as tutors, they also gain academically and professionally. Here are what a number of peer writing consultants report gaining from their Writing Studio experiences:

- It's taught me to think critically and talk my way through problems. By interacting with many students, all of different backgrounds and working in different disciplines, I've been exposed to more writing than I ever would have seen before.

- Most importantly, tutoring has taught to be more observant and patient with myself and my peers. I look at my work more critically and hand in assignments with confidence because I am now a representative of the Writing Studio. Also, since I have started tutoring, I have noticed that I am more patient when working with others. Instead of trying to get everything done quickly, I make sure that I listen to the input of everyone that I am working with to ensure that the work produced is a collaborative effort.
- Being a peer-writing consultant is a continuous learning experience. As tutors, we interact with students from various disciplines. While we are helping them with their writing, we are learning a great deal about their areas of study. I have also learned new ways to attend to each student's specific needs and effectively communicate. Being able to productively collaborate, think critically, and communicate are valuable skills that can be applied in any job or career.
- Working with students in and around writing has helped me develop my design direction, by directly complimenting my limited hands on accessories coursework. The Writing Studio has shown me that FIT was not solely my Accessories Design program. In my position as a peer-writing consultant, I've had the privilege of engaging and collaborating with students across disciplines who have inspired me in various respects (especially the international students)
- The Writing Studio confirms that it is possible to seek out and acquire work that I love, without compromising my integrity.
- Graduating this year, the Writing Studio has also influenced my abilities to stand out in the interview process, and demonstrate to hiring professionals that I have strong written and verbal communication skills, and can not only write, but also discuss writing and communicate ideas behind writing.
- In many ways, the Writing Studio has acted as a catalyst for my professional life. Besides from being one of the most rewarding and enjoyable jobs I've had, it has led me to discover my career goal. After working in the Studio for two years, tutoring students one-on-one, I decided to investigate my interest in teaching by way of becoming a museum educator. Though I had no formal training as an educator, I felt certain that what I learned about pedagogy and working with individual students in the Studio could be applied to teaching a class. After a successful internship, I was hired as a School Programs Educator in the Children's Museum of Manhattan and I owe that to all I have learned from the Writing Studio and everyone who is a part of it. Had it not been for the confidence and skills gained there, I would not be half as successful as I am in this new job.

Developing the Writing Consultant and Staff Positions

The three professional Writing Consultants have taken on increased responsibility in the past year. Their roles at FIT continue to develop as they increase their presence as leaders both when it comes to mentoring tutors and to assisting faculty in Writing Across the Curriculum Initiative. Unfortunately, the Writing Studio is limited by not have any support staff. The Studio is currently in need of more support, and there is definitely a need to continue developing the roles that the three professional Writing Consultants play.

In an effort to clarify expectations and alleviate the stress of not having an administrative assistant, a writing studio consultant handbook was written to help guide tutors in everything from working our online scheduling program to procedures for changing shifts.

Additional accomplishments

The Writing Studio has launched its Web site and continues to add helpful information for writers and faculty. We have also migrated to a paper-less system for collecting data which will not only streamline our process for handling information but will also fall in line with the green initiatives happening on campus.

Goals Set for 2010-11

While many of the goals for this past academic were met and in some cases surpassed, we will have to continue working toward some of these goals in order to keep up with the latest advancements in pedagogy. Therefore, the following are continuing goals:

Writing Across the Curriculum: New Directions

Although we accomplished quite a bit in WAC work, the reality is that we have barely scratched the surface at FIT. In the next year, we will have to refocus our efforts on educating the faculty about our services and on helping more faculty members incorporate writing into their courses. We will work toward providing more opportunities for faculty to gather to talk about writing in their courses. Furthermore, now that tutoring is operating smoothly, we have an opportunity to take new steps in addressing WAC at FIT.

Tutoring Innovation and Writing Studio Consultant Education

Both innovation and education in tutoring is an ongoing endeavor. The goal is for FIT tutors to be ahead of the curve when it comes to what's new in individualized writing instruction. Part of this will require tutors to continue with our local education program, but it will also be important that they begin sharing the lessons we have learned at FIT through publications and conference presentations. We will also be continuing our efforts to work with other writing centers in the New York City area and beyond to provide our tutors an opportunity to learn from other tutors and institutional contexts.

The following goals will be unique to AY 2010-2011:

Plan To Write

Plan to Write is a new program that allows students to come to the Writing Studio with their syllabi to create a timeline for completing assignments and to schedule appointments for the rest of the semester. The program will be designed to help students plan and prioritize their work, a skill that will help them successfully navigate the demands of their courses here at FIT.

Workshop Development

Several new workshops are being developed for the upcoming academic year. Already in development are workshops on résumés and thank you notes, which will be conducted with the Career Services and Internship Center. However, we plan to conduct our own series of workshops that deal with the concerns FIT students have about their writing.

Marketing

We will work toward marketing the Writing Studio to faculty, staff, and students to help them understand what we offer and how we can help them. The goal is to try to develop stronger connections between the work we do and the work that is being done across the college. We also plan to market to specific groups of students so they can understand better how our services relate to their needs.

Online Presence and Technological Goals

Another goal is to continue developing our online presence. Not only do we plan to launch our full Web site in the fall, but we also want to work closely with online degree programs like FMM to help assist their students in writing. Furthermore, we have set as a goal that all data collection will be online.

Statistical Information and Data Collection

The Writing Studio saw an increase in use in AY2009-10. Over the course of the year, the Studio worked with writers from various degree programs and majors on everything from pre-writing strategies to proofreading/editing strategies. A break down and brief description of the data follows:

Number of Writers and Contacts

Individual Writers	586
Contacts (number of sessions)	2302

We served 586 Students this year, which is a 111-student increase from last year. We also saw an increase of 702 contacts from last year's number. The break down of the degrees these students are working toward is below.

Writers' Degree Programs

Associates	282 (50%)
Bachelors	256 (45%)
Other (graduate, non-degree, etc.)	34 (5%)

International Students, English Language Learners

International Students	216 (38%)
English Language Learners	296 (52%)

We learned that while about half of the students who visit the writing studio are non-native speakers of English, only 38% of our students are international. This means that we are providing English language learning assistance to a number of American students for whom English is not their first language.

*Types of Learners**

Listening Learner	144 (26%)
Visual Learner	310 (56%)
Hands-on/Experience Learner	297 (54%)
Other	3 (1%)

*People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Types of Writers

Strong Writer	21 (4%)
Decent Writer	134 (24%)
Average Writer	186 (33%)
Developing Writer	150 (27%)
Struggling Writer	85 (15%)

We ask students to consider how they learn best and how they think about themselves as writers. This accomplishes two important tasks. The first is that it primes students for thinking about connections between learning and writing when they visit the Writing Studio. The second is that it provides us information about how to best help our students learn to write. If we know that a bulk of students learn visually, then we can make efforts to help them think about writing visually (for example, comparing the composition of a photograph to the parts of an essay.) Furthermore, we find that a good number of our visitors think of themselves as being average or above average writers, which confirms that the Writing Studio is seen as a place that writers of all levels can use to develop their skills.

*Session Topic**

Prewriting Strategies	8%
Early Draft Review	23%
Late Draft Review	37%
Research Strategies	5%
Citation/Documentation Strategies	4%
Proofreading/Editing Strategies	34%
Professional/Personal Writing	14%
Other	3%

*People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

With the break down of session topics, we are finding that more FIT students are finding ways to articulate their needs as writers. While the number of people seeking prewriting assistance has dropped a bit, we saw an increase in students looking for help with research/documentation style help. This might be an indication that more students are being expected to use research in their writing.

Session Satisfaction

Very Satisfied	1913 (88%)
Satisfied	220 (10%)
Neutral	24 (1%)
Unsatisfied	2 (0%)
Very Unsatisfied	11 (1%)

We decided to change how students can rate their experience from “very helpful, helpful, not helpful” to “very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, unsatisfied, very unsatisfied.” Most visitors indicate that they feel very satisfied by their session. We, however, are hoping to look into some of our students unsatisfied experiences to learn how we can improve our services. One change we have been able to make thus far is to limit the time students have to wait for a session, which has led to student complaints in the past.

The following comments from students indicate either what they have learned or what they got out of their Writing Studio experience:

“I feel like I am drowning in some of my classes because of the workload & stress makes it hard to properly think clearly & conceptualize...it was wonderful to be able to sit w/someone who could appreciate my position and give feedback & ideas for direction.”

“I know I have a better understanding on what I have to do. I got a lot accomplished today. Thank you :)”

“It helped me understand my paper and writing by having an unbiased voice. It just helps to get another person's thoughts on what I am presenting.”

“I learned native English phrasing and how to clarify my idea.”

“it helped me look at my paper as a whole and connecting all the points together.”

“My paper is tight, cohesive and ready to turn in”

“I actually had an opportunity to find my mistakes by reading out loud. She actually helped a lot to make better sentences and correct grammar errors.”

“It was very helpful in learning how to recognize grammatical errors and think of corrective alternatives.”

“Helped me reorganize my thoughts and structure of the whole piece”

“It helped me improve the flow of my paper and get a better understanding of how the format of a paper should be.”

These offer just a small sample of what students had to say about their experiences. The important finding is that students are learning how to think and write about issues in their writing from planning, to structuring, to organizing, and to proofreading.

Activities and Programming

During the 2009-10 academic year, the Writing Studio was involved in a number of activities and programs. Below are some of the highlights from these events/programs:

- The Writing Studio hosted Yeshiva and Stern College Writing Centers for a one-day writing tutor workshop. Tutors from our Writing Studio and the other two colleges gave presentations and led discussions on best practices in tutoring.
- The Language Exchange program, which was done in coordination with Asian Student Network, met every Tuesday during the fall semester. The program provided students an opportunity to learn a new language and to discuss the political, social, and cultural implications of language learning.
- CFDA workshops occurred during the spring semester and offered fashion design students a chance to improve their philosophy statements for the upcoming CFDA competition.
- The Writing Studio hosted the EN121 Essay Competition Reading. Students who were selected as this year's award winners had the opportunity to read their essays to an audience.
- The Writing Studio also hosted a number of creative writing readings throughout the year. Guest poets and fiction writers shared their work and talked to students about their writing process.
- Educational Skills Faculty met with tutors in May to discuss a number of learning issues that FIT students face and to help tutors reflect on tutoring practices throughout the year.
- The Writing Studio held two pilot writing workshops on cover letters and on articles (e.g., the, a, an). These stand-alone workshops (meaning they were not required by a class), provided students an opportunity to seek writing help outside of their classes.
- The Writing Studio also helped in the planning and execution of this year's CET Adjunct Summer Institute. The topic was ESL learners, and the Writing Studio consultants discussed the myriad issues that non-native speakers face with adjunct faculty.

Concluding Remarks

The 2009-2010 academic year has been an overall success for the Writing Studio because we have met most of our academic goals and have moved beyond most of them. As the Studio grows in popularity, however, some of the goals that were not met, particularly the staffing goals, will need to be addressed. With a significant increase in the numbers, we expect to continue to grow in terms of student contacts, but we also expect to grow in terms of college-wide writing assistance. The Writing Across the Curriculum program will develop in new directions that will provide even more faculty members the support they need in writing instruction. We will continue to work toward the goals outlined in this report and in our mission.