

Writing Assistant Handbook (2016-2017)

The Writing Center is one of five tutoring units in the Learning Commons – Buckley Center 163 Phone: 503.943.8002

-Director: Dr. Cara Hersh /office: BC 379 /phone 943-7262/ hersh@up.edu. Office hours T/2-3 and F/1-2 PM.

-Scheduling Coordinator: Allie Duven <mailto:duven18@up.edu>

-Supplies/Hotline Coordinator: Morgan Mann <mailto:mannm17@up.edu>

-WC Hotline/listserve: writing@up.edu (reaches all WAs and WC Director)

Websites to use:

-**Writing Center:** [Writing Center](#) (explore this from time to time, to remember all the resources it has!)

-**WOnline** (schedule for student appointments): <http://up.mywconline.net>

-**Conference Evaluation:** https://uportland.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6Va3WHtNEA9VHYV

-**Paperless Payroll** (to enter hours worked, bimonthly): via Self-Serve (PilotsUP). Tutorial at: www.up.edu/controller

-**Campus handbook:** *Pocket Cengage Handbook*, 8th ed. L. Kirsznar & S. Mandell.[Cengage, 2015. ISBN 9781285426617]

-**Things the Center has:** pens, reference books (Oxford Bible, Thesaurus, Dictionary, Pocket Wadsworth, guides to MLA, APA, Chicago, etc), water, a half-dozen Macs, scratch paper, handouts for your clients (wall), phone (dial 6 for an outside line), your ID badge hanging, file box stuffed with sample assignments from each of the university's disciplines.

-**Things you could bring to sessions:** laptop, your log-sheet, homework, a tabletop sign with your name on it (for ease of your clients finding you), your ID (in case door is locked, sliding it through will open the door), this reference sheet, a smile.

-**Things to include in your sessions:** rapport, energy, a sympathetic ear, a plan for the session (just the trio or so of things one can get through comprehensively), pens in the hand of both you and the student, a completed online Conference Goals form (have the student enter this at the Center before you begin if he/she hasn't done so already), student-centered learning, discussion to inform not only the paper at hand but for the student in general as a writer, on-line conference evaluation for them to fill out at the end of 20+ min. meetings, your completion (5-10 min) of a Conference Report detailing/reinforcing your advice to them (and their prof.), an entry of the session into your personal log for the sake of your time sheet.

-**The WC's Motto:** "You Have Options!" (We don't tell 'em what they "must" do, but rather remind 'em all they **can** do.)

22 Writing Assistants: (your wings – get to know them all)

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Writing Assistant Policies & Advice for the LRC's Writing Center

I. SCHEDULING:

You are responsible for all open hours under your name on the Online Scheduler. In other words, it's your responsibility – not the Scheduling Coordinator's – to note any nonconformities between your intentions and the displayed schedule. Check the schedule at the start of *each week* to be aware of appointments, errors, unexpected adjustments, holiday changes, etc. And after requesting changes to the Scheduling Coordinator, it is your responsibility to double-check to ensure the change were made. Scheduled appointments where the WA doesn't show up seriously undermine your reputation, our collective

credibility, our service to the campus, and potentially our funding.

If you know you cannot make scheduled hours, block out your name for any open slots, contact writing@up.edu to find a replacement for any filled slots, and let the Scheduling Coordinator know to adjust the schedule. To minimize confusion, aim to keep consistent weekly hours. When choosing standing hours for the semester, consider helping to fill holes in availability at the Center; ideally, we want at least one WA to be at the WC for all hours we are open: 9-9 M-R, 9-5 F, 1-9 Sun (no advising 9-1 on Sunday in deference to Mass).

We will no longer have literal walk-ins. Please be open to more students requesting appointments via the helpline and make sure that you create an appointment for them in the scheduler. To do this, click on the appropriate space (day/time/week) when you will be meeting under the “Hotline Help Appointments” and create an appointment for the student you are working with (probably done in the WC). Please also click on “walk-in appointment” for these appointments so we can track them.

When choosing your weekly scheduled hours, you should budget the possibility of fitting in one or two more, should the need arise from hotline requests or fellow WAs’ needs for substitutes (due to illness, etc.). [On the topic of illness, it is valid to cancel appointments to preserve everyone’s health, but you need to take the time to arrange for replacements, and you also need to be flexible enough when you’re healthy to leap in as a substitute for fellow ill WAs]. Flexibility is a major part of our role as a Writing Center team; we should not work as merely individuals here, but as a well-functioning group.

II. WRITING CENTER:

The scheduler will close at midnight the night before appointments. Please check in the morning to see what you have scheduled. If you have a gap of no more than an hour between appointments you may stay in the Writing Center and be paid for your time.

If you need to block out times, please use the following process: click on the purple space before your appointment block. It should open up a “blackout window” and you can change the ending time of the blackout window to the end of your scheduled shift. Your entire shift should then be blacked out. If you’re starting at 9 AM, you can also do this in reverse (click in the purple space after your shift and extend blackout hours to the beginning of the day). We are no longer using the placeholder option.

WA No-shows: if students in the WC note that their WA hasn’t shown up, make sure they’ve waited at least five minutes; check the online schedule to ensure their appt. info is correct (students are sometimes misinformed); and then give the WA a call – a sheet with WA cell numbers is located in the front desk drawer. Correspondingly, if you know you’re going to be over five minutes late for an appt., give the WC a call (x8002) to let anyone there know. Since WA no-shows seriously undermine the credibility of our service, and are an unfair burden on WAs who are left to clean up the mess, I need to know about every one of them, to ensure that the student is taken care of. If you are at the Center when a WA no-show happens, please email me the details. If you cause a no-show, please let me know immediately what happened and what you’ve done to remedy the situation. Repeated no-shows, especially ones you neglect to self-report to me, are grounds for dismissal.

Student No-shows: students who fail to appear for appts. are a serious drain on WC resources. First, on the online scheduler, mark the appointment as “Missed” (this sends out a robo-message to the student). Then email the student directly (by the day’s end at the latest), to indicate your disappointment and why their absence is a problem. Send a cc. of your note to me so I can record the frequency of their no-shows and email to repeat offenders a warning of our 3-strikes law.

During no-shows or when students haven’t signed up to your standing hours, please prioritize doing WC-related work (emails, conference reports, reviewing WA-assisting materials) before doing non-WC-related tasks. These are good times to refresh yourself on WC advice and ideas by reviewing your English 317 notes, texts, and WC reference books.

Greet students who enter the WC, even if they’re not yours. See if you can connect them with the right person. Avoid texting during or near a session.

Wear your badge while working in the WC.

Avoid piling your backpacks, books, and things on the table, esp. during a session (to reduce clutter/distraction).

Maintain a professional setting for the LRC by: greeting any puzzled visitors, answering the phone if you’re available to (use the greeting: “Learning Commons”), keeping the space tidy.

The listserve writing@up.edu reaches all WAs and the Director. Any available WA should reply (particularly if

you're working in the WC at the time), for we state that we respond to all questions within 24 hours.

When you reply to a query, always hit REPLY ALL so that we know the question has been answered.

Report any accidents that occur in the WC to the Director.

You no longer need to submit EoSRS to me! Make sure you keep track of your hours for payroll, but beyond that you should be all set.

The only people who are allowed to use the services of Writing Assistant conferencing are students currently enrolled in UP classes.

If the WC is locked, WAs should be able to gain entry with the swipe of their card anytime between 7am-11pm.

Since training new WAs involves a long process, it is crucial you let me know as soon as you can if you will not be working in an upcoming semester. Please let me know at least a semester in advance if you will not be working the following semester, as I will need to make arrangements to fill your slot/specialization. Waiting until the start of a semester before letting me know will cause a great many problems for both the Writing Center and the Department that nominated you.

The WC closet houses water, supplies, and math solutions manuals that only Assistants are allowed to use. For security reasons, the closet should be kept locked – the key is in the front desk drawer.

Each semester, a dozen students are referred to us from the Office of Students with Disabilities, in need of a “Dedicated Writing Assistant” – someone who has a weekly standing appointment with them to go over their work. Each WA should expect to take on at least one student per year (especially if they seek help in your specialized field), as these needs arise. Note that most of these requests arise early in the Fall when our staffing is at its lowest, so it will be important for returning WAs to take these requests.

III. HOURS/PAYROLL:

You are responsible for keeping accurate track of the hours you work at the Writing Center. Billable hours include time spent at your scheduled hours (whether or not a student signs up), writing WC-related emails, working at workshops or classroom introductions, mentoring, attending WC meetings, and reviewing WC-related notes/student assignments/handouts/reference books.

Be sure you've not only logged these hours in Paperless Payroll by the bi-monthly noon deadline, but also that you have hit the “Submit for Approval” button. (If you miss the deadline, you will need to contact me.)

Whenever you get your paycheck, be sure it matches up with the hours you logged.

Rules on UP student employment (starting summer 2012) limit you to three active campus jobs max., \$8,000 total earning limit (July 1-June 30), and a requirement to take a 30 minute break if working 6 consecutive hours or more (including multiple jobs) and have that break reflected on your timesheet(s).

Enter time in 15 minute increments, using the 7/8 rounding rule to round time appropriately (7 minutes worked should be rounded down while 8 minutes worked should be rounded up).

Wage rates are \$9.25/hr. during your first year and goes up from there.

Payday is the 10th and 25th of the month.

IV. CONFERENCES:

Our aim is to assist students in achieving competence in a very specific form of writing: American academic prose. This mode comes with certain rhetorical moves and values that include clarity, specificity, succinctness, flow, unity, and a certain formality. This is only one among many styles and forms of writing, but it is the one most college-level courses demand, and is also transferable to a great many careers.

Stay positive and upbeat about a paper's potential, remembering that all papers are drafts.

Be attentive and flexible; watch body language; gauge mood; offer positive comments; ask open-ended questions.

Focus on *higher-order* concerns (purpose, audience, thesis, organization, paragraph structure, consistency), before tackling *lower-order* concerns (grammar, spelling, style). The one exception is if a student or his/her instructor directly specifies something he or she wants to work on, in which case that's what you should prioritize, moving later toward higher-order concerns if time permits.

Frame your advice not as what they “must” or “should” do, but what **options** they have. Foreground this idea of **choice**, even as you weigh in on your sense of the best one.

Our service is one of helping students become stronger writers so they can submit stronger responses in their writing assignments. Please limit your advice to that goal; unless you have a professor's

permission, we should not help students with *take-home exams* and *non-writing-based assignments*. WAs should avoid doing full rewritings of a student's sentences or paragraphs. As much as possible during the session, the student should be wielding the pen. As trained Writing Assistants, you are responsible for helping students with their writing regardless of the subject, course, or the citation style they use. During sessions, actively use the WC's reference books to chase down specific answers. Using these books not only leads to solid answers but also models how students can find answers on their own. If you find yourself stumped by a question during a session, admit you don't know the answer. But seek out answers (from fellow WAs, peers, or professors) so that you can respond knowledgeably the next time the question arises. (Pass along your good findings to fellow WAs via writing@up.edu if you deem it particularly useful; likely, we could all benefit from your research.) For sessions that last 20 minutes or more, have students fill out an anonymous [on-line eval](#).

V. CONFERENCE REPORTS:

Submit a Conference Report for each session you have, for these are a vital way to reinforce your advice to the student, and to allow the student's professor to hear of our help. CRs are especially important for professors who require a WC visit, for it is the student's proof of attendance. For this reason, submit your CRs very soon after the appointment – ideally within 24 hours, but 48 hours *at the latest*. To do this, go to the bottom of an appointment window, and click on “Add New Client Report Form.” Fill in the report MAKING SURE THAT YOU add in the professor's email address. If you would like a copy you can click “Email Resource.” In the rare case of a student asking if we can block the CR from going to their professor (for whatever reason), we can certainly honor that request. Always check to ensure you have typed the professor's email correctly – it will not reach him/her if it is incorrect. Note that some professor emails include last name and first initial. It is also equally vital to ensure he or she spelled the professor's name correctly, for that spelling is how they are greeted on his/her copy of your CR. We humans feel deeply personal about our names, and any typos coming from the Writing Center are embarrassing. You can make changes directly to the Report before sending. Since you are giving advice not just for the assignment but to make the student a stronger writer, craft your report as a present-tense, active-voiced message in second-person address to the student (rather than a past-tense, passive-voiced, third-person report, which sounds too clinical and removed). Be brief, but specific and precise. (e.g. don't say “watch comma usage,” but specify “avoid overuse of commas”) A good, user-friendly structure: for every separate point of advice, start with a brief sentence stating the larger Rule/suggestion, then follow with how the student could apply that rule to their current paper. Since the CR arrives in email form, choose a layout that is easy to read in that format. For example, rather than type your CR as one big text block, include occasional spaces between your lines, for ease of online reading. Since we want to push students to improve their draft, no matter how strong it is, avoid over-praising a paper. Keep its overall quality an open-ended issue, rather than making such a broad claim as “The paper is really well written” (instead, specify which elements are strong, e.g. “X, Y, and Z are in good shape...”). Avoid such definitive claims as, “The only thing you need to fix is...” or “All that's needed is...” for likely there are other things that could potentially be strengthened. The CR is also an excellent place to add any points you realize you forgot to cover during the session.

Thank you for the work you do at the UP Writing Center this year. You are helping to increase students' power to communicate, which is a mode of democratic social justice in the world.