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# A proposal for a writing center at Lafayette High School

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A Proposal for A Writing Center at Lafayette High School

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An Honors Program Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts and Letters

James Madison University

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by Katherine Leigh Utne

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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Writing, Rhetoric & Technical Communication, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank Dr. L. Anita Swinton, the principal at Lafayette, and Lafayette faculty Mrs. Brenda Fairbairn and Mrs. Stephanie Stewart for participating in interviews and providing me with the necessary information to tailor this proposal to Lafayette.

Additionally, I would like to thank the JMU Honors Program for the opportunity to complete this project and the resources provided along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unending encouragement and support. I couldn't have done it without you.

# Transmittal Letter

**Date:** April 9, 2016
**To:** Ms. Anita Swinton, Ms. Michele Newcomb, and Mr. Howard Townsend and LHS Faculty
**From:** Katie Utne
**Subject:** Writing Center Proposal

Dear Ms. Swinton, Ms. Newcomb, Mr. Townsend and LHS Faculty:

I am writing to suggest the addition of a writing center at Lafayette High School and to submit the accompanying materials for the proposed Ram Writing Center.

A 2012 alumna of Lafayette High School, I am currently a senior at James Madison University studying Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication and German. For the past two years, I have been working on this writing center proposal as my senior honors project with the help of my adviser, Dr. Kurt Schick, and my readers, Ms. Judy Salzman and Dr. Scott Kizner.

Two years ago, I started working at the University Writing Center at JMU and noticed how helpful it was for the students, tutors and faculty. Curious about the benefits of a writing center at the high school level, I began researching high school writing centers, and following Dr. Schick's advice, I created the initial draft of a proposal for a writing center at Lafayette High School.

After interviews with faculty at Lafayette and a personal conversation with Ms. Swinton, I revised my proposal, adapting it to Lafayette's needs. What follows is a detailed proposal that:
- Identifies the need for and the benefits of a writing center at Lafayette.
- Answers critical questions concerning the center's development and management.
- Contains a case study of Edison Writing Center at Thomas Edison High School in Northern Virginia.
- Outlines the specific goals and policies of the proposed writing center.
- Provides materials for the creation and maintenance of the proposed center.

It is my hope that the addition of the Ram Writing Center would supplement writing instruction at Lafayette, better equipping students to meet the English 10 SOL and preparing them for writing beyond high school, by providing students with specific feedback for and tools to improve their writing.

Thank you for your time and your help. Please let me know if you have questions or if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,
Katie Utne

**Identifying the Need for a Writing Center at Lafayette**

As more students register for advanced classes, class sizes continue to grow. With up to thirty-five students per class (and up to 120 students per teacher due to A/B day scheduling), teachers find it difficult to focus on individual students (Fairbairn, Salzman, Swinton). In addition to tailoring their instruction to fit the general needs of the class, they must also put concentrated effort into classroom management. This leaves little to no time to work with individual students and help them succeed in areas where they are struggling. Additionally, teachers do not have time to challenge the most advanced students and provide them with more opportunities for growth, which can lead to additional problems within the classroom (Fairbairn, Salzman, Stewart, Swinton).

Writing is one academic area that can suffer as class sizes increase. With more papers to grade, it takes longer for teachers to provide sufficient feedback, and even then a student may only notice the grade and conclude, "The teacher simply does [or doesn't] like my opinion" (Fairbairn).  This lack of communication between students and teachers makes it difficult for students to improve as writers, since they are unable to get (or understand) the personalized feedback they need to grow. Teachers can make general statements in class, but often students may not realize that these writing tips apply to them, and if they do, they may find it difficult to apply these tips to their writing assignments (Fairbairn, Salzman, Stewart). In contrast, tutors are trained problem-solvers, capable of diagnosing the difficulty, supplying specific feedback, and offering techniques for improvement on an

individual basis. Tutors fill an in-between role, as they are not authoritative faculty members but knowledgeable experts who can provide explanations to students experiencing difficulty with an assignment. Instead of evaluating students' writing or simply offering answers, tutors work collaboratively with students, encouraging them to think and reframing writing in a positive light (Harris, "Talking in the Middle").

Poor writing performance does not mean that the students are unintelligent or incapable of learning. Many students have the knowledge and the comprehension ability expected of their grade level, but they struggle to express themselves on paper. They need help putting what they know into a cohesive essay (Fairbairn). If they are unable to receive proper guidance, then they will often perform poorly on writing-based SOL and AP tests and could be ill-prepared for college classes and the workplace (Fairbairn, Stewart). However, with the right tools and guidance, they should be able to perform just as well as their peers.

Although the Academic Enrichment Period (AEP) provides students with an opportunity to get extra help from their teachers, some students are still hesitant to approach their teachers for the help (Salzman), perhaps due to a lack of motivation or incorrectly assuming that the teacher would not care or understand (Fairbairn). Because of this perception, the amount of time it takes to provide detailed feedback for thirty-five rough drafts and an attempt to foster autonomy in the classroom, teachers often offer peer review workshops in class. However, these workshops may not work as well as teachers intend them to because the students are not sure what

to look for, feel afraid to make the comments they know they should, or do not take the workshops seriously. In contrast, writing tutors are trained to be expert peer reviewers, skilled in identifying problems and creating solutions. Developing this skill will not only benefit students in tutoring sessions outside of the classroom, but also in the classroom as tutors interact with their fellow students in peer review workshops.

## Benefits of a Writing Center at Lafayette

Creating a writing center at Lafayette would benefit students of various writing abilities in a variety of tasks. Students who lack confidence in their writing could get a second opinion and learn ways to improve their papers, helping them to feel more confident about their writing ability. Having a conversation with a writing tutor would help Lafayette students to understand the writing process and would help them to think critically about the assignment and their writing. The proposed Ram Writing Center would teach students anything from brainstorming a topic, to writing a cohesive paragraph, to outlining a four-page paper, and would also be able to help students with college application or scholarship essays. Ultimately, a writing center at Lafayette would not only meet the students' writing needs but also help them develop a new mindset toward writing.

Currently, many teachers and students view writing as a fixed ability. Throughout her career as a history teacher, Brenda Fairbairn has noticed that the educational culture has shifted to include a group of people who "can't write." Writing is often viewed as a gift that students and even teachers do or do not have, an example of Carol Dweck's definition of a fixed mindset, the belief that intelligence is already established and cannot be developed. While a fixed mindset can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and can limit people's ability to reach their full potential, Dweck asserts that people with a growth mindset (believing that their full potential is indefinable and that they can continue to build to an unknown extent on their existing intelligence, personality and abilities) are more likely to take risks

and learn more. Following a growth mindset, students and teachers alike can frame writing as a skill that develops over time with practice and proper feedback. As Kay Severns notes in her article, "A Secondary School Success Story for Writing Enthusiasts," their writing center at Deerfield High School in Illinois not only dramatically changed the writing ability of their students, but also their perception toward writing. Instead of labeling themselves and their writing as a success or a failure, the students and faculty began to view the writing center as a safe place to take risks and to learn, allowing students the freedom and the opportunity to improve.

Research indicates that not only does a writing center help the tutored students become better writers, but it also offers many opportunities of growth for the tutors themselves. In *Tutoring Writing*, Donald McAndrew and Thomas Reigstad explain that peer tutors also become better writers and communicators because they are coaching others through their papers (11 − 12). Tutors have practice with leadership, communication and troubleshooting because they have to learn how to convey ideas to their peers in a constructive, encouraging way. This ability to offer and receive useful feedback without taking it personally addresses the current problem with peer review workshops. Tutors are able to empathize with those having difficulty writing, but still offer suggestions for improvement. This method of collaborative learning teaches teamwork and critical thinking and helps students apply what they learn outside of class, as these skills are not only important for good tutoring practice but also applicable to everyday life.

**Writing Center Resources: Critical Questions and Answers**

Many colleges have writing centers that high schools can model but not necessarily copy. Over the past half century, the number of college writing centers in the U.S. has grown rapidly, followed closely by the increase of high school writing centers. Richard Kent begins *A Guide to Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers Grades 6-12* by reasoning that high schools should have writing centers because colleges do (2). In "The Writing Center Model at the Heart of Writing Instruction from Kindergarten to College," Ellen Brinkley argues that since many high schools do not offer regular office hours for students to seek out their teachers for help, writing centers are even more important at the high school level (3).

However, college and high school writing centers do not need to look identical. They can hold sessions differently and can provide various services. Writing center director James Upton adds that high schools can offer mini clinics for exam writing, research processes and products, and abstract writing, which are not always found in college writing centers. He also suggests that they hold writing contests, swap books, and publish students' work (67 – 68).  Opportunities such as these can help high school students learn more about writing and also connect them to the writing community. The following questions explore the various approaches that high schools across the country have taken toward their writing centers and seek to recommend what methods Lafayette should adopt for the proposed Ram Writing Center (RWC).

**Who Should be a Tutor?**

*Research*

Most writing centers employ either student or faculty tutors or both. Oak
Knoll School of the Holy Child Jesus in Summit, New Jersey, only uses student
tutors in order to create a collaborative environment. They refrain from employing
faculty tutors because they think the students might not take suggestions from
faculty due to the generational gap, according to Harriet Marcus and Pamela
Farrell in *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One* (39 –
40). Other schools have labs where the faculty tutor or instructor teaches to a small
group of students and then works with them individually (Sorenson 86). Faculty
tutors can closely monitor the quality of tutoring that the students get; however,
using faculty tutors can also limit the length of the tutoring session and the amount
of personal feedback that students can receive. Alternatively, as Kerri Mulqueen
notes in Dawn Fels and Jennifer Wells' compilation, *The Successful High School
Writing Center*, using both students and teachers as tutors will "bridge some of the
cultural and generational divides" (30).  Lisa Smulyan and Kristin Bolton of
Swarthmore College's writing center call teacher tutoring "being on the fence"
because while they are tutoring, they do not fit neatly into the student or teacher
category (46).

Schools who employ student tutors vary on where they pull their tutors from.
Oak Knoll requires all honors students to tutor two sessions per week (Marcus and
Farrell 40). This provides an adequate labor force; however, some of the tutors may
not care about tutoring or even be able to connect well with the student writers

because they have not had to wrestle with learning to write well.  To solve this problem and ensure that the tutors actually want to work, Kent's school in Maine has teachers and fellow students recommend tutors, and they, combined with other interested students, can sign-up for his writing center English class (34). Similarly, Highland Park High School in New Jersey offers a writing and responding class for its juniors (Brooks and Lefelt 49-51).  Alternatively, students at Kettle Moraine High School in Wisconsin have to apply to become writing tutors and undergo a screening process to gauge the potential ability of the tutors (Kent 110).

*Recommendation*

Based on the success of the I-PASS athletic tutoring program, Lafayette has established that students are capable of tutoring their peers. Recruiting students to be RWC tutors will increase the number of tutors available, will create a collaborative environment, and will be a part of the process to train students to be better peer reviewers. In order to select quality tutors and not overburden honors students, teachers should recommend students in both their advanced and regular classes who have expressed interest or have grown in their writing. Other interested students can also apply. After tutor training, tutors can assess their comfort level for various writing assignments, and the director can create the schedule accordingly. In this way, Lafayette can create a strong base of student tutors and if faculty wish to tutor in the RWC, their expertise would be welcome.

## How Should We Train Tutors?

*Research*

Each high school has formed its own method for tutor training. Indian Hill High School in Cincinnati, Ohio has a twenty-hour week of training before school starts. The students discuss readings, write for an hour, share what they wrote and offer feedback, and participate in mock tutoring sessions. Throughout the year, tutors journal about their sessions, turn them in on Fridays, and receive the director's feedback on Mondays (Ackley 65 – 72). Highland Park High School has its new tutors slowly pick up tutoring sessions throughout the year, so that by the end of the year there are two groups of tutors—novice and experienced. They also meet twice a month for training and group cohesiveness (Brooks and Lefelt 49 – 51). Mulqueen describes how her students observe a college writing center and experience tutoring from the college students, before they become tutors themselves (30). Some faculty tutors have tutoring instruction, such as the Gateway Writing Project summer training in St. Louis, but others do not (Wright 76).

*Recommendation*

Initially, the Ram Writing Center director at Lafayette can train tutors during AEP or after school. The course should explain writing center pedagogy and collaborative ideology and demonstrate how it can be implemented (Schick et al.). To achieve maximum potential, the course should cultivate teacher-student collaboration, which would influence the center's development as a unified resource to help all students involved improve their writing (Schick et al.). The enclosed Tutor Training Curriculum details eleven 20-minute sessions and a supplementary

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reading guide for the tutors. These sessions cover the basics of tutoring and writing pedagogy and are intended to give tutors a firm basis for tutoring techniques. In addition, prospective tutors should observe tutors at the William & Mary Writing Resources Center and undergo a mentorship process. As the RWC expands, Lafayette could add a tutoring writing class, increasing the amount of training and professional development that tutors receive. As an incentive for tutoring, students could receive community service hours and potentially class credit if the training became a scheduled class.

**How Should a High School Writing Center Be Organized?**
*Research*

From the number of classes the director teaches, to the length and format of sessions, writing centers vary in their organization. Depending on the size and scope of the writing center, the director may teach fewer classes than other teachers, the same amount, or none at all (Kent 18). The more time the director is able to spend in the center, the more organized and efficiently the center will run. To help with session expectations, Farrell and Speiser suggest having teachers submit their writing assignments to the center, so that tutors know the guidelines when the students come in (10). Additionally, some centers ask students to turn in a rough draft the day before, enabling the tutors to be even more prepared for the sessions (Brooks and Lefelt 47). Depending on the scheduling needs of each high school, sessions vary in length and most sessions last between fifteen minutes to an hour throughout the school day (Harris). In some schools, students must skip a class in order to come to the writing center (Brooks and Lefelt 47), and other times

they come during their lunch period or before or after school (Kent 5). Many schools

have free blocks or study halls, which allow tutors and students to use the writing

center at those times (Ackley 65).

Schools have developed a variety of methods for students to register for

tutoring sessions. Highland Park simply lists an "x" when tutors are available, so

that students are not influenced by who the tutors are (Brooks and Lefelt 50).

However, Mulqueen cites instances when name recognition can be positive. For

example, if the tutors are respected members of the school community, it may help

students to view tutoring as a positive service (33). Kent also suggests having an

online sign-up system (88). Many schools may transition to this as the Internet is

convenient and easily organizes data. Finally, Kent and Ackley both emphasize

keeping records of all of the tutoring sessions, enabling directors to analyze their

centers' effectiveness and how they can improve (Kent 74 – 79 and Ackley 71 – 72).

*Recommendation*

In the early phases of the RWC, the director could be given a course release

from teaching one or two classes, receive an extra stipend—similar to athletic

coaches, the band, choir and orchestra directors, etc.—or a combination of the two.

The director will be responsible for training the tutors and managing the RWC.

Tutoring sessions will last twenty minutes, take place three times per week during

AEP, and could start out as walk-in sessions. As the RWC's popularity increases,

the center could offer specialized appointments in addition to walk-ins. Tutors

would advertise their areas of expertise, and students could sign up with them

based on their assignments and questions. Walk-ins would be geared to students with general needs, and newer tutors and tutors with the lowest level of tutoring comfort could provide walk-in help, while experienced tutors and faculty could offer the specialized help.

**How Can a Writing Center Help Tutors?**
*Research*

During a typical session, a tutor listens to and analyzes the student's main concerns and decides what techniques would be useful to address them. Over time the tutors develop effective problem-solving techniques and are also able to apply writing center methods to their own papers. Therefore, not only can writing tutors help other students' writing improve, but they can also enhance their own writing. In addition, the problem-solving techniques they develop for tutoring sessions can also apply elsewhere. Bradley Hughes and his fellow researchers from the Peer Tutor Alumni Research Project interviewed peer tutors to discover what they learned from the tutoring experience. They found that most peer tutors developed techniques and insights that they can apply to many different life situations. These abilities include: a new understanding of writing, an aptitude for listening, better analytical skills, more confidence, and the increased capacity for collaborative learning (Hughes, Gillespie and Kail 14). Similarly, Kent found that his student tutors gained confidence, listening skills, and a better grasp of writing strategies (5 – 6). Mulqueen observed that her student tutors often developed leadership skills (28).

*Recommendation*

As the research has indicated, training students to be writing tutors, not only benefits their ability to write, but also prepares them for higher education and/or their future careers. Creating a Ram Writing Center will provide another avenue for Lafayette to help students acquire these analytical, leadership and problem-solving skills.

**For More Information Please Visit:**

- *The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) website.* The website provides tips and resources for new and existing writing centers, such as links to writing center literature, like the *Writing Center Journal* and *Writing Lab Newsletter* and links to conferences and other writing center websites. The IWCA is the hub of the conversation on and development writing center pedagogy and practices.

- *Websites of other writing centers.* The student tutors at Oakton High School and Edison High School in Fairfax County have blogs for their writing centers. Websites such as the National Writing Project and the National Council for Teachers of English keep readers updated on the current news for teaching and tutoring writing. Attending writing center conferences can also help writing centers learn from each other.

## Case Study: Edison Writing Center[1]

In 2008, Amber Jensen founded the Edison Writing Center (EWC) at Thomas Edison High School in Fairfax County, Virginia. Currently, EWC has almost 70 tutors and two directors, and during the 2013 – 2014 school year, they held over 2100 tutoring sessions. In the writing center's early days, the tutors and students met after school one day per week. However, many students had scheduling difficulties, and attendance was lacking, so Jensen decided to bring the writing center into the school day. She revamped the advanced composition course and created a new curriculum to teach her students about tutoring and different genres of writing. The students now explore various writing styles in depth (as a final project, first year writing tutors complete an eight-page paper analyzing writing in a specific discipline), but Jensen also focuses on teaching them strategies to help them coach their tutees into better writers, too. The center is continuing to grow— teaching the tutors leadership skills and helping all of the students to become better writers.

Edison High School has an A/B block schedule; they have four classes per day that alternate every other day. Jensen teaches two advanced composition (writing center) classes—one every other day—during third block. The EWC is open during all three lunch periods Monday through Thursday and one day after school. The tutors split into different lunch breaks so that there are always tutors to help the students who come in during their lunch periods. Jensen devotes Fridays and the

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[1] Information gathered from a personal interview with Jensen, her online prezi presentation ("An Introduction to High School Writing Centers"), and the EWC's website.

part of class time in between lunch breaks to instruction. This time is split between Jensen's instruction and the experienced tutors sharing what they have learned with the new tutors.

Becoming a writing tutor gives students an opportunity "to take ownership of their learning," said Jensen, and students start taking initiative and developing professional skills from the beginning. In order to become a tutor, students must be recommended by a teacher, send in an application and writing sample, and participate in a group interview. This helps them practice for the professional world, and it also makes the program more competitive. Experienced tutors develop leadership skills and responsibility because they mentor the first year tutors, showing them how to incorporate the tutoring methods they learn in class. Students also have additional responsibilities, such as writing for the blog (http://edisonwritingcenter.blogspot.com), establishing connections with teachers, putting on events, or tracking the session data. The student-driven mentality contributes to the success of the writing center because it keeps the students involved and responsible.

In order for the EWC to be successful, Jensen knew that she needed to gather support from other teachers, allowing them to offer as much feedback as possible, and from the administrators. Since students must have a teacher recommendation to apply, teachers get a say in who will work in the writing center, and as a result of feeling included in the process, they will often recommend the writing center to their students. Additionally, branding the writing center with a logo and a color

scheme because created a recognizable presence for the EWC. Jensen also recommends keeping statistics to show the value of the writing center, as well as gathering student evaluations that provide anecdotal evidence for a writing center. Finally, a writing center should be self-sustaining and not dependent on a particular person to run it. Jensen keeps records of all that she does and has created a tutor handbook so that the center could run without her if she left.

With thirty-seven new tutors this year, the Edison Writing Center is continuing to grow. Schools across Northern Virginia are quickly developing writing centers, and the idea is continuing to spread. Writing centers offer numerous opportunities for all of the students involved, whether they are tutors or tutees, and help to prepare them for college and life after graduation.

For additional information, visit the EWC website: http://edisonwritingcenter.blogspot.com or watch a five-minute video from Fairfax County Public Schools that provides an overview of the Edison Writing Center: http://www.fcps.edu/it/streaming/is13_writingctr.asx

## Research Conclusion

In order for the Ram Writing Center to work well, it will need support from students and teachers. To help tutors have a better understanding of what the teachers are looking for in a particular assignment, teachers should submit their assignment sheets to the writing center. Additionally, teachers should also recommend the writing center to their whole class or to specific students. As motivation for the more hesitant students, teachers could offer incentives such as extra credit or homework passes. To further involve teachers, they should also suggest students who would make good tutors.

Introducing a writing center at Lafayette will not only benefit all students involved, those being tutored and those tutoring, but also the teachers. Instead of students relying solely on teachers to provide writing help, writing tutors will offer students concrete feedback on their writing and specific tips for improvement. With the proper training, tutors will be able to diagnose difficult writing areas and creatively devise solutions to help their peers and will be able to use these problem-solving skills for their own writing and in other professional situations. By partnering with teachers to help students address writing needs and by incorporating students from all levels of English classes as tutors, the Ram Writing Center seeks to increase diversity at Lafayette and improve student teacher relationships.

The following documents provide further specifics for the Ram Writing Center and materials for tutor training and writing center management.

**Detailed Proposal for the Ram Writing Center**

The purpose of the Ram Writing Center (RWC) will be to cultivate writing ability, facilitate collaborative learning, and foster creative leadership in students of all aptitudes through peer tutoring sessions and writing workshops. The RWC will provide tools for learning and critical thinking that are indispensable in the classroom, the workplace and in our civic lives. The Ram Writing Center's resources will not be limited to the English department; instead, the RWC will cross departmental boundaries and focus on enhancing literacy within the school.

## Mission Statement

- The Ram Writing Center cultivates writing ability, facilitates collaborative learning, and fosters creative leadership in students of all aptitudes through peer tutoring sessions and writing workshops.

## Goals

- To help students of all writing abilities to become better writers.

- To support diverse learners by employing tutors from various educational and ethnic backgrounds.

- To help student tutors develop better leadership, communication, writing and troubleshooting/problem solving skills.
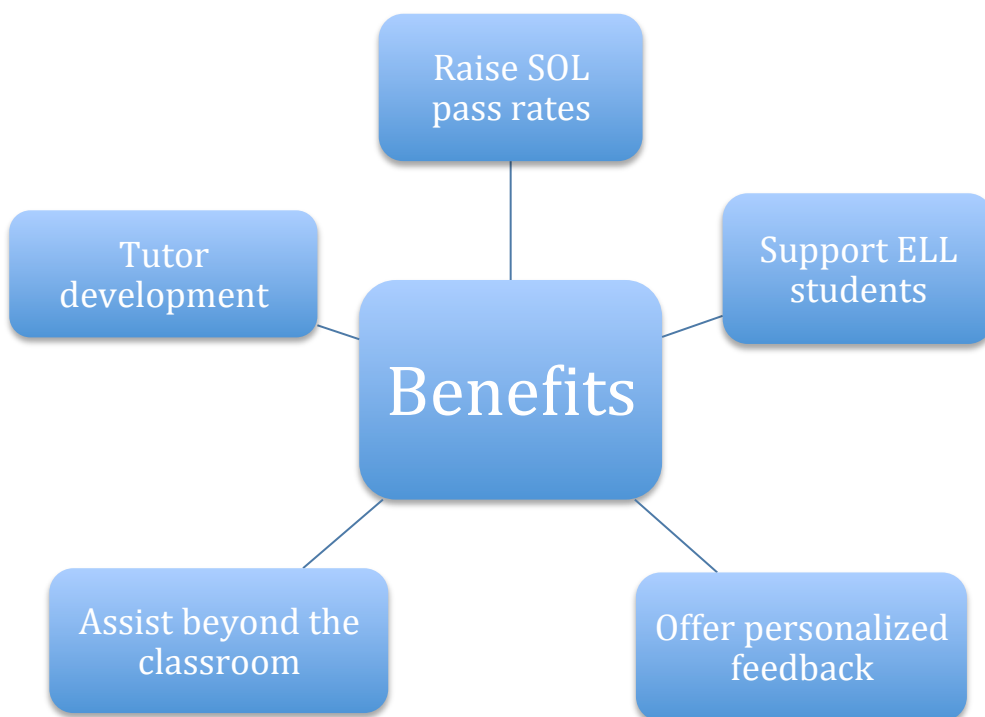
- To assist teachers by providing students with additional feedback and pointers that the teachers do not have time to provide because of class size and A/B scheduling.

- To partner with teachers to address the writing needs of their students by providing strategies and techniques to combat these problem areas.

# Policies

- We offer twenty-minute sessions with a peer tutor during AEP, providing an encouraging atmosphere for students to explore writing techniques and methods to improve as writers.

- We empower students to take ownership of their writing. We are NOT an editing/proofreading service.

- We guide students through the writing process, answer questions, and offer advice. To support academic integrity, we will not write their papers for them.

- We support teachers by providing students with personalized feedback on writing assignments.

Raise SOL pass rates

Tutor development

Support ELL students

Benefits

Assist beyond the classroom

Offer personalized feedback

# Benefits

- **Raise SOL pass rates.** All students must pass a writing SOL in tenth grade. The scores for Lafayette have declined, but a writing center can help students develop the skillset they need to pass it. Writing centers in Northern Virginia, such as Annandale High School have worked with students and teachers to strengthen their writing ability to pass the SOL (Mandefro). The RWC could hold workshops focused on helping students to prepare for the timed writings: training them to create coherent essays with developed topics.
- **Support multilingual students.** The percentage of English Language Learners has also increased at Lafayette and a writing center could provide another resource to help them master writing in the English language. Tutors will receive training to help them understand cultural writing differences, coach students through critical reading, and explain English grammar rules.
- **Offer personalized feedback.** As a result of A/B scheduling, teachers have an average of five classes at a time instead of three, meaning they teach almost twice the amount of students than they used to. Additionally, the average class size is twenty-five students, but in many advanced classes, the number can reach as high as thirty-five. With such a large number of students, teachers have less time to grade papers and to meet with individual students who need specific, additional guidance. A writing center will give students the opportunity to have one-on-one consultations to talk about their papers with trained tutors. The sessions will help them improve their current papers and also give them tools to make writing easier in the future. Students may have the capacity to understand and critically analyze complex material but have difficulty communicating their ideas on paper. Writing tutors will help them learn how to organize their thoughts and write a cohesive essay.
- **Assist with writing beyond the classroom.** A majority of Lafayette's students pursue higher education (56 percent of the 2014 graduates continued their education at a four-year university and an additional 26 percent enrolled at a two-year college or vocational school), and most of these students need to write essays to apply for college and scholarships. A writing center would help students individually, and it could also hold workshops for writing those essays.
- **Provide tutors with leadership experience and better writing skills.** Student tutors will learn how to work with their peers to help them develop better writing skills. Through explaining these techniques to their peers, student tutors will have a better understanding of good writing and be able to apply these tools to their own writing. In addition, tutors will gain communication skills and discover practical problem-solving methods by learning how to explain writing methods in a variety of ways.

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    │ Scheduling │       │        │   Peer   │
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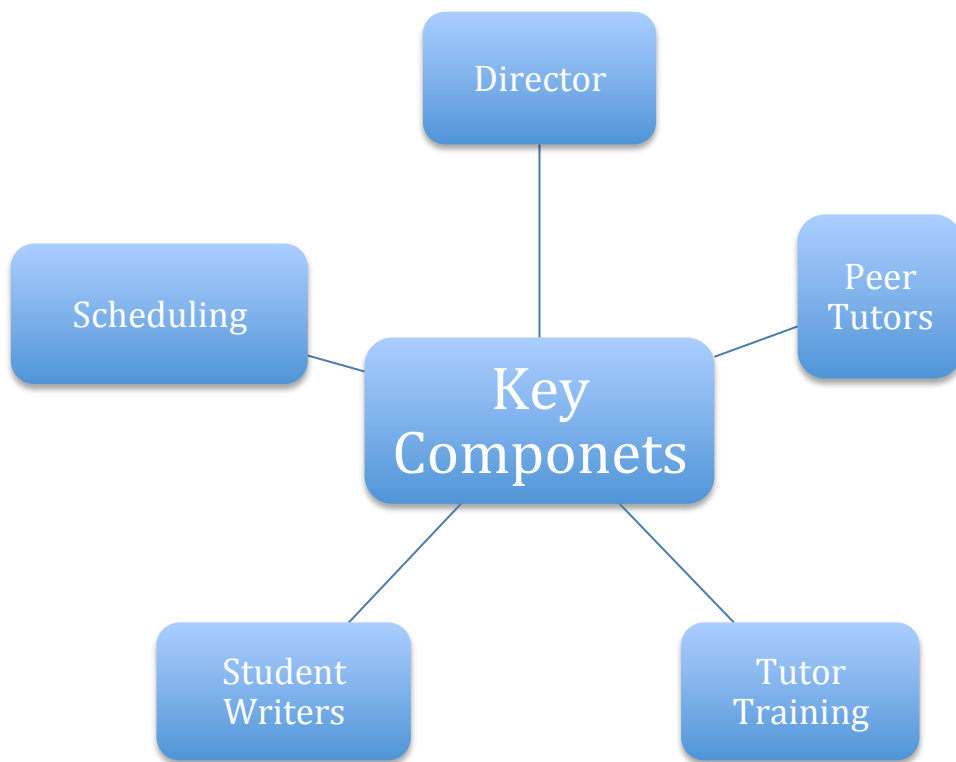
# Key Components for Success

- **Director.** The director's job is to coordinate tutor "hiring" (not a paid position for tutors), scheduling, training, writing center promotion, track writing center statistics and effectiveness, and make improvements as necessary. Responsibilities of the director will include:
  - Reviewing tutor applications and accepting students who are personable and capable of thinking critically, developing their writing, and explaining concepts to others.
  - Creating a schedule for the tutors to know when they are tutoring and to allow students to sign up with a particular tutor for help with an assignment. The schedule should list which classes or what kinds of assignments tutors can help with to guide students through the sign-up process.
  - Training and providing on-going professional development for the tutors.
  - Working with faculty to promote the RWC's resources and to gather recommendations for tutors to increase usership and the number of tutors.
  - Tracking RWC statistics, such as number of sessions, the types of writing needs, student feedback, teacher feedback and tutor feedback to analyze the effectiveness of the RWC and to understand how to make improvements.

- **Peer Tutors**.
  - Teachers should identify students in all of their classes, (advanced or regular), who have shown improvement or interest in writing and critical thinking skills. The goal is not to overburden the advanced students, many of whom are already very committed, but to give all students the opportunity to serve as a writing tutor and develop their own writing skills while helping others.
  - Identified students and students expressing interest in the RWC should then apply to work at the RWC.
  - All students will undergo the same training, and each tutor's writing ability and perceived comfort for different writing assignments or writing needs will determine the types of assignments he or she will provide aid for.
  - Tutors should receive community service hours for their work in the writing center.
  - During the initial phase of the RWC, Lafayette should seek to secure ten – fifteen tutors, expanding this goal as the center's popularity increases.
  - As the RWC expands, Lafayette could consider offering a course for writing tutors. This could take the form of an English elective or the material could be integrated into a required English course.
- **Tutor Training**.
  - *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* by Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmereli is available for free for writing centers and covers the tutoring method and strategies for both high school and college writing centers.
  - The director should lead the tutors in discussions about the training material (see Tutoring Curriculum) and have them practice tutoring each other.
  - The training sessions could either happen after school or during AEP.
  - The College of William & Mary has a writing center run by Sharon Zuber. Lafayette's student tutors should observe several tutoring sessions at William & Mary to have a better understanding of how tutoring works.
  - After the initial training, students should receive additional training to increase knowledge about particular types of writing and tutoring strategies.
- **Scheduling**.
  - If Lafayette starts off with ten tutors working all three days, the RWC could service up to thirty students per week.
  - As the number of tutors increases, the RWC will expand and tutors will also have to work fewer days per week.

- ○ Ideally all of the writing tutoring will happen in a designated classroom (or the library), away from students working on other assignments.
- **Student Writers.**
  - ○ The RWC should be open to all Lafayette students to help with writing assignments in all classes.
  - ○ (Some or all of) RWC tutors should provide feedback and assistance for personal statements and scholarship essays.
  - ○ The RWC will be available to supplement English language learner instruction.

# Tutor Training Outline

The following eleven sessions are designed introduce students to tutoring pedagogy and train them to become effective tutors.

These sessions, which cover the important aspects of general tutoring, should last approximately thirty minutes and could take place during AEP or after school. Lafayette could also adapt these sessions into a weeklong training camp before the school year begins. Other options include adding these lessons into an existing English class or developing an elective course specifically for tutoring writing. These options would allow students to explore tutoring pedagogy in further detail and would also include supplementary writing assignments.[2] The director can also incorporate some of these supplementary writing assignments into the AEP or after school sessions to his or her discretion.

As a supplementary learning opportunity, prospective tutors should be first tutored by the William & Mary Writing Resources Center. Afterward, they should observe at least five sessions with different tutors each time. Ideally, Lafayette students would then co-tutor three sessions with William & Mary mentors and tutor three sessions on their own, receiving constructive feedback from their mentor afterward.

This collaborative, observational model is roughly based on the tutoring writing course offered at James Madison University and outlined by Kurt Schick, et al. in "The Idea of a Writing Center Course."

Approximate Time Matrix for Prospective Tutors

| | |
|---|---|
| Reading and preparation | 20 minutes before each session, totaling 3 hours 40 minutes |
| Training session | 30 minutes each, totaling 6 hours 30 minutes |
| Receiving tutoring from W&M | 1 hour |
| Observing tutoring sessions | 5 hours minimum |

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[2]Supplementary writing assignments for students could include: *reflections* (on their own writing process, being tutored at the William & Mary Writing Resources Center, techniques learned in the tutoring course, etc.), *a research paper* about writing in a specific genre or discipline, or *a genre paper*—practice writing in a specific genre (news article, movie review, editorial, analysis paper, research paper, etc.)

Approximate Time Matrix for the Director

| Reading and preparation | 40 minutes – 1 hour before each session; totaling 7 hours 20 minutes – 11 hours |
| --- | --- |
| Training session | 30 minutes each, totaling 6 hours and 30 minutes |

- **Session 1: What is tutoring?**
  - Objective: Students will be able to explain tutoring and the different roles tutors play.
  - Meeting the objective:
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 1 pages 4 – 8 ("The Many Hats Tutors Wear")
    - *Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* Chapter 3 pages 25 – top of 28 ("Introduction" and "The Tutor Does Not—And Does—Have To Be An Expert")
    - Discuss how tutoring differs from teaching and editing.
    - Discuss the difference between collaborative learning vs. directive learning.
    - Establish the goal of tutoring: tutors should help students become better writers. They do not "fix" papers; instead, they provide insight, techniques and strategies to make writing easier and more manageable.
  - Suggested reading for the director:
    - *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* Chapter 1 "What a Peer Consultant Is and Isn't"
    - *St. Martin's* "The Idea of a Writing Center" and "Revisiting the Idea of a Writing Center" by Stephen North and "Collaboration, Control and the Idea of a Writing Center" by Andrea Lunsford
- **Session 2: How does one tutor?**
  - Objective: Students will describe effective tutoring tools and how to use them.
  - Meeting the objective:
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 2 pages 11 – 25
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 3 pages 28 – 34
    - Discuss how to begin a session. Brainstorm techniques for making the student feel comfortable, methods for explaining what the writing center does, and approaches for collaboratively establishing what the goals of the session will be.

- Discuss how to end a session: recap and help the student understand what the next steps are.
- Discuss active listening, facilitating by responding as a reader, and wait time. Understand how these tools work in the tutoring session and what they accomplish.
- Discuss the example sessions in the text. How do the tutors model these tools?
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - The Tutoring Cycle: http://lss.ucsc.edu/files/tutor%20cycle.pdf
    - *A Tutor's Guide* Chapter 1 "Setting the Agenda for the Next Thirty Minutes" by William J. Macauley, Jr.
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 4 "Examining Expectations"
- **Session 3: What is the writing process?**
  - ○ Objective: Students will be able to explain the various stages of the writing process.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 2
    - Discuss the different stages: prewriting, writing, revising and editing.
    - Understand the importance of each stage and how they are different.
    - Students should discover how they use the writing process and what techniques work for them.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - *Tutoring Writing* Chapter 4 "The Writing and Tutoring Processes"
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 2 "The Writing Process"
- **Session 4: Tutoring throughout the writing process (Part I: Brainstorming)**
  - ○ Objective: Students will learn tutoring techniques for the brainstorming process.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 4 pages 28 – 36
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 3 pages 38 – 39 ("What If There's No Essay?")
    - Discuss techniques to help students brainstorm ideas, such as asking open-ended questions, conversation, freewriting, etc.
    - Discuss methods for developing a topic and organization (outlining, mapping, etc.).
    - Learn how help students understand the prompt. Discover how to ask leading questions to help students come up with ideas.
    - Explore approaches to help students create a research question.

- ■ Brainstorm ideas to help students use their gathered research to create a thesis statement and an outline.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - ■ *Tutoring Writing* Chapter 5 "Tutoring When the Writer Does Not Have a Draft"
    - ■ *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* Chapter 5 "Finding a Focus"
- **Session 5: Tutoring throughout the writing process (Part II: Revising & Rewriting)**
  - ○ Objective: Students will learn tutoring techniques for helping with higher order concerns.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - ■ *Bedford Guide* Chapter 3 pages 37 – 39
    - ■ *Longman Guide* Chapter 3 pages 35 – 38 (Higher Order Concerns Come First and Another Conversation)
    - ■ Discuss what higher order concerns are (organization and development of ideas) and why they are important to address early on.
    - ■ Understand techniques such as reverse outlining and reader response.
    - ■ Learn to ask open-ended questions to guide the writer through the revising process and keep them in control of the paper and session.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - ■ *Tutoring Writing* Chapter 6 "What Tutoring Is" pages 42 – 56 "Higher Order Concerns"
    - ■ *A Tutor's Guide* Chapter 11 "Organizing Ideas?"
- **Session 6: What are common mechanical and editing concerns?**
  - ○ Objective: Students will recognize common mechanical and editing concerns and understand how to address them.
    - ■ Discuss common mechanical, grammar and style mistakes (run-on sentences, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, subject-pronoun agreement, verb tenses, dangling modifiers, parallelism, etc.), and ways to effectively explain what they are and how to fix them.
    - ■ Learn how to use a handbook and the internet to find appropriate answers to mechanical, grammatical and style questions.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - ■ *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* Chapter 7 "Correcting Surface Errors"

- **Session 7: Tutoring throughout the writing process (Part III: Editing & Proofreading)**
  - Objective: Students will learn tutoring techniques for helping with later order concerns.
  - Meeting the objective:
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 3 pages 39 – 42
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 3 pages 38 – 45
    - Discuss later order concerns (grammatical errors, wordiness, choppiness, etc.) and effective methods for helping writers fix sentence-level problems and avoid these mistakes in the future.
    - Learn tools to eliminate wordiness and choppiness by reading aloud and focusing on the importance of each word and its connection to the rest of the sentence.
    - Learn how to use the modeling technique to help writers understand the concept of sentence-level revision and be able to revise on their own.
  - Suggested reading for the director:
    - *Tutoring Writing* Chapter 6 "What Tutoring Is" pages 56 – 62 "Lower Order Concerns"
    - *A Tutor's Guide* Chapter 16 "Can You Proofread This?"
- **Session 8: Working with different types of writers**
  - Objective: Students will learn different strategies and techniques for sensitively and effectively helping writers from all backgrounds.
  - Meeting the objective:
    - *Longman Guide* Chapter 9
    - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 4 pages 56 – 69 ("The Writer with Writing Anxiety" to "The Writer with a Physical Challenge")
    - Discuss common difficulties that basic writers, English language learners and writers with learning disabilities face.
    - Discuss ways to express sensitivity and brainstorm ways to adapt the session to help writers of various backgrounds.
    - Discuss how sessions with English language learners are similar and different to sessions with native English-speakers. Understand that the writer still has ownership of the paper and is still responsible for ideas, but has different language needs that require a slightly different approach.
  - Suggested reading for the director:
    - *A Tutor's Guide* Chapter 7 "Recent Developments in Assisting ESL Writers"

- ■ *St. Martin's* " Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center" by Julie Neff, "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction by Sharon A. Myers, and "Addressing Racial Diversity" by Nancy Baron and Nancy Grimm
- **Session 9: Writing across the curriculum**
  - ○ Objective: Students will understand techniques and strategies for tutoring writers on a variety of subjects.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - ■ *Bedford Guide* Chapter 5 pages 72 – 79 ("Research Papers" through "Powerpoints")
    - ■ *Longman Guide* Chapter 12 pages 158 – 165
    - ■ Discuss writing assignments in classes that are outside of the English department (gather examples from teachers at Lafayette who often assign writing tasks).
    - ■ Discuss the reader response technique and how to give feedback based on organization, clarity and writing concerns rather than the content. Reinforce the idea that the writer is still the owner of the paper, not the tutor.
    - ■ Know where to look up the standard conventions for the genre of the assignment.
    - ■ Understand the purpose behind writing styles (MLA, APA, AP, Chicago, etc.) and where to look to find instructions for formatting papers based on the style.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - ■ *A Tutor's Guide* "Tutoring in Unfamiliar Subjects" by Alexis Greiner
    - ■ *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* Chapter 10 "Specific Kinds of Writing
- **Session 10: Writing personal statements**
  - ○ Objective: Students will understand techniques and strategies to help other students write effective personal statements.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - ■ *Bedford Guide Ch*apter 5 pages 79 – 87 ("Résumés" through "Application Essays")
    - ■ JMU UWC Online Writing Tips and Resources, Writing Personal Statements "Drafting, formatting, and a sample statement" from Indiana University
    - ■ Discuss the purpose and audience for resumes and personal statements. What are the important elements? Who is reading this?

- - Understand elements of a good introduction, body and conclusion. Learn how to ask questions and guide the writer to stories and detail that will help them illustrate their uniqueness.
    - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
      - - Choose one or two common personal statement prompts to use as examples to help the tutors understand what effective personal statements are and how to help students write them.
- **Session 11: Handling difficult sessions**
  - ○ Objective: Students will learn techniques and strategies for effectively handling difficult sessions.
  - ○ Meeting the objective:
    - - *Longman Guide* Chapter 13 pages 181 – 185
    - - *Bedford Guide* Chapter 7 pages 103 – 110
    - - Discuss problems that writing tutors can encounter: unresponsive and antagonistic writers, writers who have substantial revisions to do, and sessions that seem to fall apart.
    - - Review the responsibilities of writers and tutors and discuss methods for reestablishing them in the session.
    - - Discuss problem-solving techniques: brainstorm questions to ask to refocus the session, help the writer better understand the audience and the purpose of the assignment, and take ownership of the paper.
    - - Understand that there is no "special tutoring formula"; the goal is to equip the writer with the tools necessary to successfully complete the assignment and future papers.
  - ○ Suggested reading for the director:
    - - *A Tutor's Guide* Chapters 3 & 4 "(Non)Meeting of the Minds" by Nicole Kraemer Munday & "Talk to Me" by Muriel Harris

# RWC Tutor Application

Name: _____ Date: _____

Grade: _____

*Please respond to the following questions in one – three paragraphs:*

**Why are you interested in tutoring?**

**What do you think are a few important qualities of a writing tutor?
Describe how you demonstrate or possess these qualities.**

**I understand that should I be selected as a tutor, upon my acceptance, it is
my responsibility to attend all training meetings and to tutor the agreed
upon hours in the RWC.**

Signed:_____ Date:_____

# RWC Session Report Form

**Date:** _____

**Student:** _____
**Tutor:** _____

What did the session accomplish?

<table>
<tr><td>

**Prewriting**
____ Brainstorming
____ Selecting a topic
____ Outlining and Planning
____ Research
____ Other? _____

</td><td>

**Drafting**
____ Thesis creation
____ Introduction
____ Conclusion
____ Organization
____ Using sources and evidence
____ Other? _____

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

**Revising**
____ Organization
____ Cohesion
____ Other? _____

</td><td>

**Editing**
____ Style (conciseness, clarity, etc.)
____ Grammar
____ Punctuation
____ Citations
____ Other? _____

</td></tr>
</table>

Briefly describe the session:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

## Appendix A

Appendix A displays a poster Lafayette could use to encourage students to apply to be writing tutors.

Do you...

like writing?
like helping your peers?
want community service hours?

**Apply to be a writing tutor!**

RWC

# Appendix B

Appendix B displays a poster Lafayette could use to encourage students to use the RWC.

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