Promoting the Writing Center at Berwick High School

BERWICK WRITING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Olivia Rios
Bloomsburg University
Berwick High School’s
The Write Place

- Bloomsburg University Collaboration – Jess Weber and Molly Phelan
- Bob Calarco – director
- Opened Fall 2011
GOAL:

- To get the whole school involved so Berwick’s “The Write Place” promotes a school-wide writing culture
Writing Advisory Committee
IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CURRICULAR WC

“Writing centers should be the ‘hubs’ of academic and professional discourse, places that celebrate the different written conventions of each discipline” – Paulette Golden
**Method**

- Survey Faculty
- Interview volunteer members of the BWAC
- Share survey results with members
Survey

- Spring 2012 - digital survey sent to 70 faculty members
- 27 responses
- Rationale
“My experiences also revolve around colleagues in rhetoric and composition and from disciplines across the university who either do not know what we do in the writing center or have conceptions of writing center work that differ greatly from reality” – Jessica Clark
Survey Questions

- Describe the role you see the writing center playing in the development of student writing.
- Describe the role of the writing center on the improvement of student work for individual assignments.
- Identify which department you belong to at Berwick High School. Then describe the role of the writing center as an aid and resource for your particular classroom and students.
- How do you think the writing center helps students and teachers outside of the English department?
- Do you think the writing center satisfies its goal of being a “school-wide” initiative? If so, how? If not, why not and do you have any suggestions to help the W.C. meet this goals?
RESULTS

- LENS: Bloomsburg University Writing Center
- Preconceptions
- Suggestions
RESULTS- PRECONCEPTIONS

- Weak Writers
- Editing Service
- Writer-focused
- Across the Curriculum
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preconceptions</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Misguided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weak Writers</strong></td>
<td>4* -- “Students who are interested in writing utilize the center to better their writing skills, students who struggle in writing are utilizing it for the additional help they may need”</td>
<td>9-- “those who are struggling and not those students who are in higher level classes”</td>
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<td><strong>Editing Service</strong></td>
<td>12-- “Many teachers, I think are still under the impression that the Center is going to help produce ‘mistake-free’ papers. This is just impossible…” “enhance writing techniques for future activities and/or assignments”</td>
<td>9-- “needless grammatical, spelling errors could be ferreted out before turning paper in”</td>
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<td><strong>Writer-driven</strong></td>
<td>2-- “Changes themselves and not have it done for them, which increases the learning process”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td><strong>Across the Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>13-- “It is not just a program for the English department. It is a program for the Senior High” “EVERYTHING is related to written communication”</td>
<td>11-- “as it stands right now, this is probably the weakest part of the center’s services”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Science department – I see no use for this resource in my classroom.” “I don’t think many teachers utilize this resource outside of the English Department”</td>
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Weak Writers

Three writing center founders Childers, Fels and Jordan speak passionately about this subject: “[...] a secondary school writing center is primarily a place where we work with all students, regardless of their innate talent, to build their confidence and competency as writers”.
EDITING SERVICE

Kenneth Bruffee: “What peer tutor and tutee do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread”
**Writer-Driven**

- Bloomsburg’s Practices
  - Pencil always in writer's hand
  - We do not write on their papers
Across The Curriculum

- Writing Across the Curriculum
- Writing in the Disciplines

New Core Curriculum:
- “Writing Standards for English Language Arts”
- “Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Science, Science and Technical Subjects”
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

• “[...] The professionals who staff the high school center need not and should not all be from the language arts department; instructors from all disciplines who are interested in writing/learning should be encouraged to work in the center” – James Upton

• “Centers that adopt collaboration across the disciplines and between academic levels, with Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs or high school-college collaborations, can make an especially strong impact on students and school communities” – Thomas Tobin (The Clearing House)
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

“By working with faculty members across the campus and learning about the different styles within each discipline, tutors and administrators can help writers enter the academic conversation [...]” – Paulette Golden (Praxis: A Writing Center Journal)
RESULTS-SUGGESTIONS

- Mobility
- Writing Contests
- Professional Development
- Across the Curriculum
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Writing fellows—have consultants assigned to each classroom helping teachers. More informal mobility—take consultants to classrooms to work with students for convenience/time constraints.</td>
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<td>Writing contests</td>
<td>Increasing student interest in writing. Designing contest prompts that feature writing in different disciplines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Teachers lack of confidence in their own writing. Seminars for teachers about writing. Work with teachers one-on-one. In-service days about approaches to teaching writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Across the curriculum</td>
<td>Teachers communicating with teachers. Building time into curriculum for all disciplines. Common language to teach writing.</td>
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INTERVIEWS

- 8 interviews of volunteer committee members
- Rationale
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Committee Member</th>
<th>Feedback Highlights</th>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Coordinator</td>
<td>Committee as liaisons Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Committee set goals Professional Development Raise student interest in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Consistent writing language across curriculum Communicate to students W.C. is not editing service</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL/ELL Faculty</td>
<td>Committee as liaisons Let examples/good experience speak for value of W.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Type</td>
<td>Feedback Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math Faculty</td>
<td>Consistent writing language across curriculum Committee as liaisons</td>
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<tr>
<td>History Faculty</td>
<td>Represent departments view of writing More information-weekly/monthly emails Common writing language – FEEDBACK especially</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted Faculty</td>
<td>Committee as liaisons Use W.C. to incorporate writing into more departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Consistent writing language across curriculum Positive outlook on writing center thus far</td>
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COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- My research
- Open Forum
FUTURE PLANS

- Improve availability
- Expand to middle school/elementary school
- Cross-curricular writing handbook
CONCLUSION

- Value working with high school faculty across the curriculum

- Importance of WAC and engaging in these conversations to avoid misunderstandings
WORKS CONSULTED


