

UWC MONTHLY

A publication of the James Madison University Writing Center

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UWC Tutors Awarded for Excellence

JMU students, faculty, and administrators convened this fall for the Learning Centers' inaugural Tutor Excellence Recognition Celebration. The celebration honored the dedication and excellence of 33 graduated and current tutors from the Communication Center, English Language Learner Services, the Science and Math Learning Center, Supplemental Instruction, and the University Writing Center. Among the honored students were UWC tutors Justin Thurston, Olivia Mankowski, and Paul Loman—all of whom have graduated—and current UWC tutors Camille Corum and Jennelle Martin.

The award recipients—each with a minimum of five semesters served in any of the learning centers—were selected based on their commitment and enthusiasm. “They have embodied the kind of student that Madison strives to produce and support,” said Learning Centers Executive Assistant Joan Fahrney,

“Moreover, they have shown through their willingness to tutor with excellence that they believe in the power of education and its ability to better both the world and the individual.”

Although the number of hours served did not figure in the evaluation process, Thurston—who worked in the UWC from 2008-2012—happens to lead all tutors with 980 hours. The total is impressive, but Fahrney expressed the Learning Centers' decision to value quality over quantity: “I feel confident in saying his ‘hours’ were probably driven more by passion than by paycheck.” Following Thurston is fellow writing tutor Mankowski at 633 hours. When asked how it felt to honor all of the tutors recognized at the celebration, Fahrney said, “I was amazed, humbled, and impressed. I came to realize that all of the students who work for us are all remarkable people, not just great students.”

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Behind the “Magic Numbers”

UWC faculty members, graduate tutors, and peer tutors worked this fall semester to begin identifying innovative ways of assessing how well the Writing Center meets its learning objectives. Next spring, graduate practicum students Prabin Lama and Matt May will join the effort. Along with fellow graduate students Emiline Buhler and Megan Brenneman, Lama and May will conduct alumni surveys, lead focus groups, and code data from writing session observations.

Their efforts will inform UWC marketing, future internal assessment plans, and long-term research projects. The new team will foster collaboration among professional development groups, marketing interns, and the *UWC Monthly*, seeking to make existing (as well as newly generated) data both meaningful and accessible. As a part of this endeavor, the *UWC Monthly* will spotlight assessment projects in its spring issues. Stay tuned!

- Emiline Buhler graduate tutor



Tutors Reba Leiding and Megan Brenneman in the UWC.

Photo credit: Carly Botero

The Magic Numbers

November / December

Wilson Hall consultations: 434 / 226
Carrier Library consultations: 50 / 30
Rose Library consultations: 52 / 15
FYI consultations: 26 / 15
APC consultations: 7 / 5
Total: 569 / 291
Workshops total: 5
Students and faculty attending: 110
Link Library visits: 279/125

Jennelle Martin: Six Semesters a' Tutoring, Five Golden Locations

Jennelle Martin sat down for her first tutoring session in Spring 2007, back when the UWC's thriving peer tutoring program was still a glimmer in the Learning Centers' eye. Six years later, with six semesters of tutoring experience to her credit, Martin has memories and advice to share.

Martin was a senior English major serving her second semester in the Huffman Hall FYI Writing Center when she participated in JMU's first ever Tutoring Writing course in Fall 2007. When she returned to JMU in Spring 2011 for her master's degree in Secondary Education, Martin picked up right where she left off, applying for a position as a University Writing Center WC graduate tutor. "I remembered that when I tutored before, it didn't feel like work," said Martin, "and that's the best kind of job to have."

During that first semester back, Martin tutored in the UWC's Carrier and Rose Library locations. A semester later, Martin split her tutoring time between the two Write Nights sites and the UWC's home in Wilson Hall. And when the UWC opened its new Athletic Performance Center satellite location this semester, Martin was again on the front lines.

Martin's tutoring skills will serve her well this coming semester in her Spotsylvania hometown, where she will student teach middle- and high school English classes. She does not leave empty-handed. In November, Martin was one of five UWC tutors honored at the Learning Centers' inaugural Tutor Excellence Recognition Celebration. "I was surprised," Martin said, "I never had more than an hour a week in Wilson my entire time tutoring. I work nights and spend very little time in the main hub of our operation." Martin shouldn't have been surprised, as it is precisely because of her efforts over the past six years to expand the UWC's frontiers that she was honored. She is the first JMU tutor to serve in five different campus locations.

As Martin prepared to leave JMU for second time, she found a few moments to reflect on her experiences over the years.

Your most memorable tutoring session?

One of my most memorable sessions lasted only about twenty minutes, with a student who had never utilized our services before. At the end of the session, she actually *hugged* me. I think I sometimes forget or underestimate the level of gratitude students have after working with one of us. Her expression of gratitude, although uncommon, reminded me of why I do what I do.

How will you remember the UWC?

I'll remember the people I've worked beside, and their personalities and tutoring styles. We've asked each other for tutoring help, and we've shared our reservations about our own writing, which makes the experience so much more comfortable, because no one is perfect and we are all still developing.



Jennelle Martin with Kathleen Stewart

Photo credit: Caroline Prendergast

What has working in the UWC meant to you?

Working as a writing tutor has been an experience of discovering who I am as a writer and helping others realize this too. It's made me a more confident writer and made me more confident in helping others write. Working at the University Writing Center has helped me realize that peer collaboration can be a very powerful tool for improving as a writer.

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Jennelle Martin continued

How will your tutoring experiences help you in your teaching?

Tutoring gave me the experience of working with students and helping them to understand how to help themselves. Teachers also need this skill of scaffolding the writing process for students so that, ultimately, they will be able to work on their own. I think about tutoring in a similar way that I think about teaching: my job is to help students develop their own awareness of who they are as writers and to want to improve their skills. I realize that many students still have misconceptions about what writing tutors do, but proper modeling by tutors can help change those perceptions.

Your best tutoring secret / best bit of advice to new tutors?

Embrace each session and each student as something and someone new. Free your mind about any preconceived notions you may have about a student, because going into a session with an open mind helps you understand what he or she needs.

“Not only did the Writing Center help me achieve good grades in my classes, it also made me more confident in myself as a college writer.”

- Becky Rosen, freshman Communication Studies Major

Tutors Awarded continued

Tutors were delighted to see their hard work appreciated. Thurston made the trip back to JMU for the celebration to join Martin and Corum, who was “pleasantly surprised” to be selected. “It felt really great to be recognized for the many hours that I’ve tutored,” said Corum, adding that “I love that I have an insider’s place in reading and working with JMU’s student writers.”

Dr. Mark Warner, JMU’s Senior Vice President of Student Affairs and University Planning, headlined the celebration, offering his own words of appreciation and congratulation before reading a message from President Alger. “Our tutoring program at JMU is truly special,” Alger wrote, “Your efforts embody the best of the Madison spirit and community and make us all proud.” The Learning Centers are also grateful for the support of Associate Vice President of Student Success Randy Mitchell, the Office of the Provost, and the many faculty members across JMU whose contributions made the first Tutor Excellence Recognition Celebration a success.

An award board featuring the names of the award recipients was unveiled at the celebration and is currently on display on the first floor of Wilson Hall. It will remain there until 2014, when it will be relocated to the new Learning Centers home in Constitution Hall. Planning for next year’s Recognition Celebration is already underway.

- Mackenzie Kelley, marketing intern



Peer tutor Sarah Stacy working with Philipa Owusu-Antwui

Photo Credit: Carly Botero

Nothing But Blue Skies: UWC Faculty Present in San Diego

The students, faculty, and staff at JMU's University Writing Center are always looking for ways to further their professional development. Current UWC faculty writing consultants Jared Featherstone and Laura Schubert and former UWC faculty writing consultant Karen McDonnell did just this at the 2012 International Writing Centers Association conference, held in October in San Diego, California.

Founded in 1983, the IWCA strives to "foster communication among writing centers and to provide a forum for concerns." This year, the board asked participants to consider shifts, or tides, in their writing center communities. Featherstone, Schubert, and McDonnell's presentation, titled "The Fading Line Between First-Year Writing and Tutor Training Pedagogies," reflected the conference's theme, "Like Lines Drawn in the Sand."

Their roundtable discussion drew on their experiences as teachers of both the First-Year Writing and the Tutoring Writing courses at JMU. McDonnell summarized the relationship between these two distinct, but similar, courses: "We've noticed over the years that some of the approaches and work we do to shape writing tutors bleeds over into our work with first-year writers. We've found ourselves deliberately trying to cultivate the qualities and mindset of writing tutors in our first-year writers." The presenters focused particularly on a number of pedagogical



UWC Coordinator Jared Featherstone on his way to IWCA

imports from Tutoring Writing, arguing that blurring the lines between the two courses has helped their First-Year Writing students to think like tutors, which has helped them improve as writers.

Sharing their thinking with other writing center scholars inspired valuable ideas and insights that Featherstone, Schubert, and McDonnell plan to incorporate into their future instruction. "Conferences are always great opportunities to advance the scholarly conversation about a shared topic of interest," McDonnell said. "Attending a conference can give you practical strategies and techniques that you can implement, and it can even spark creative ideas and fresh motivation."

For McDonnell, the experience was especially enriching. "As someone who is not currently working in the writing center, I was reminded of the importance of writing centers as sites for learning," she said. "I'm always blown away by the smart, interesting work writing center scholars are producing." Schubert agreed, noting that she enjoyed attending IWCA panel sessions and "hearing what other writing centers are doing." "It is always a privilege to interact with colleagues in the field," Schubert said, "and I left the conference feeling inspired."

- Kaitlyn Schmit, peer tutor



Laura Schubert and Karen McDonnell at IWCA

UWC Alumna Julia Cavalieri Markets Her Tutoring Skills

Alumna Julia Cavalieri's experience with the UWC enriched her last year at JMU, allowing her insight into the writing process and into how her writing skills could serve her career goals.

During her undergraduate career at James Madison University from 2007 to 2011, Cavalieri majored in Communication Studies with an emphasis in Public Relations; she added a minor in Writing and Rhetoric. Cavalieri recalled her writing classes fondly, saying that her professors' positive feedback and encouragement gave her confidence to help others with their writing.

Even before joining the University Writing Center team, Cavalieri enjoyed discussing the writing process with her peers. "Helping my friends understand their writing assignments and coaching them to produce better writing was something I had fun doing, so I researched how I could get more involved in tutoring writing at JMU," Cavalieri said.

During her senior year, Cavalieri became a peer tutor in the UWC, which she characterized as a great way to end her undergraduate career. Cavalieri particularly remembered the University Writing Center's welcoming atmosphere, where faculty and students collaborate on research projects and the overall development of the Center. In addition to working with the UWC team, Cavalieri enjoyed discussing the writing process with her tutees. She said that each tutoring session was a different interpersonal experience and a fun mental challenge. "Tutoring tested and expanded my intelligence in ways my conventional coursework could not," Cavalieri said.

Since her graduation, Cavalieri has worked in the Communications and Marketing department at the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) in Washington, DC. GMA is a trade association that represents food, beverage, and consumer product companies. Cavalieri markets the company's events and conferences, and helps to coordinate the company's social media outreach efforts. Her experience with GMA has led her to consider pursuing

a career in health communication.

Cavalieri routinely draws on her experiences in the University Writing Center while on the job. When one of her superiors asks her to proofread a press release, Cavalieri recalls all the skills she honed during her University Writing Center tutoring sessions, when she had to assess JMU writers' needs, concerns, and hopes in just a few quick minutes. "When one of my superiors asks me to quickly proofread a press release," Cavalieri said, "it's just like reading a student's paper—except it might be picked up by *The Washington Post*, and I get to use a red pen."

- Megan Brenneman, graduate tutor



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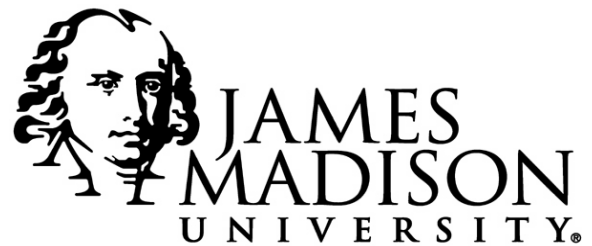
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Learning Centers tutors and JMU faculty and administrators at the inaugural Tutor Excellence Recognition Celebration this fall



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