

Academic Learning and Language (ALL)

December 2009

Report on Student Evaluation of ALL Writing Centre: Semester 1, 2009.

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Background

The Writing Centre (WC) is run by Academic Learning and Language (ALL) staff from the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD). It is one of the core activities of ALL and provides advice and support in all aspects of learning for students from across the university, at all levels and from all backgrounds.

Students attend the WC on a drop-in basis (no appointment is required), and see a lecturer for approximately 15-30 minutes at a time. The WC operated from the beginning of Week 3 (10th August) until the end of Swotvac (19th June) at the following times:

Mondays & Wednesdays	2:00pm - 4:30pm
Tuesdays & Thursdays	10.00am - 12:30pm

The WC assists students with all aspects of their learning, but consultations usually focus on specific questions around assignments. Common topics of discussion include: analysing and understanding the assignment questions; undertaking internet and library-based research; brainstorming and mindmapping ideas; planning essay and report structure; structural elements such as introductions, conclusions, and paragraphs of the main body; editing and proofreading, and English language expression and grammar. The WC does not do editing or proofreading for students, but can give guidance on the extent and impact of errors in English, and how to address these through an independent learning approach.

The following survey was adapted from a similar survey administered to visitors to the CLPD's Maths Learning Service (MLS). The purpose of the survey was to identify the main ways that students find out about the WC, as well as to assess the general satisfaction of students with the service. The survey was conducted online via Survey Monkey, and was emailed during Swotvac to all students who had attended the WC. Information on responses follows.

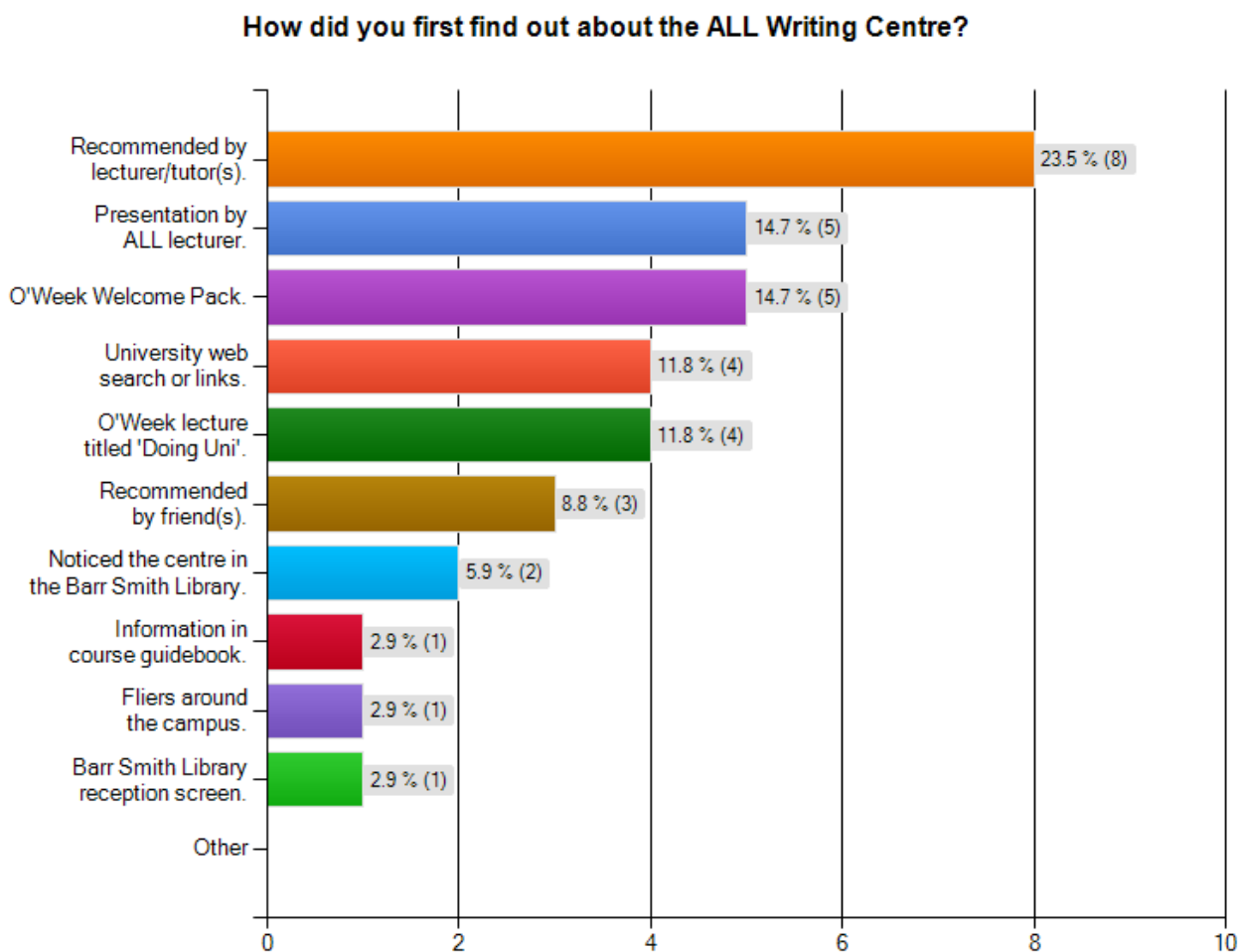
Response Data

Total number of students emailed with survey: 170

Total number of responses: 34

Response rate: 20%

Effectiveness of promotion strategies



Discussion

The above data indicates that by far the most effective way of promoting the Writing Centre is through collaboration with Faculty-based lecturers and tutors. This confirms the experience that when student development activities are promoted and endorsed by discipline-based academics (or when they are promoted by an ALL lecturer), students are more likely to attend them. This supports the notion that the CLPD should continue to collaborate closely with Faculty staff, which is one of the main strategies of the Centre. Nonetheless, a variety of other methods of engaging students (particularly via the O'Week welcome pack) is also important, and so the array of strategies used to promote the WC should be continued.

Student Satisfaction

Please select the most appropriate option for the following questions:										
	Strongly Agree			Undecided			Strongly Disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
ALL Writing Centre provides a comfortable learning environment.	41.2% (14)	35.3% (12)	17.6% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.9% (2)	0.0% (0)	5.94	34
ALL Writing Centre staff are interested in helping students learn.	50.0% (17)	38.2% (13)	8.8% (3)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.35	34
ALL Writing Centre staff gave me opportunities to ask questions.	52.9% (18)	35.3% (12)	8.8% (3)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.38	34
ALL Writing Centre staff directly addressed my concerns and gave useful feedback.	41.2% (14)	41.2% (14)	8.8% (3)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	6.03	34
Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my confidence in writing.	38.2% (13)	32.4% (11)	20.6% (7)	8.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.00	34
Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my essay/report writing skills.	29.4% (10)	35.3% (12)	26.5% (9)	8.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.85	34
Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my understanding of assessment tasks.	38.2% (13)	32.4% (11)	17.6% (6)	8.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)	6.03	34
Attending the ALL Writing Centre has made a difference to my success at university in Semester 1, 2009.	38.2% (13)	29.4% (10)	17.6% (6)	8.8% (3)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	5.79	34
<i>answered question</i>										34

The above data suggests that student satisfaction with the Writing Centre is very high. The broad satisfaction for each item is as follows:

ALL Writing Centre provides a comfortable learning environment: **94.1%**

ALL Writing Centre staff are interested in helping students learn: **97%**

ALL Writing Centre staff gave me opportunities to ask questions: **97%**

ALL Writing Centre staff directly addressed my concerns and gave useful feedback: **91.2%**

Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my confidence in writing: **91.2%**

Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my essay/report writing skills: **91.2%**

Attending the ALL Writing Centre has improved my understanding of assessment tasks: **88.2%**

Attending the ALL Writing Centre has made a difference to my success at university in Semester 1, 2009: **85.2%**

Based on the above broad agreement, the mean average for all items can be taken as overall satisfaction with the service. Therefore it can be said that student satisfaction with the Writing Centre achieved a **broad agreement of 91.9%**. This is, obviously, a very positive result and mirrors anecdotal evidence that students are very happy with the service provided.

Qualitative feedback

What were the best aspects of the Writing Centre, and why?

A total of 21 students responded to this question. Out of these, nine students commented on individual staff members using adjectives like “friendly” and “helpful”. For example, “A girls [sic] who worked there went out of her way to help me”; “Very helpful”; “Friendly smile”. This indicates that the effort put in by individual staff members to engage students and make them feel welcome is well worthwhile, and that the one-to-one format engages students effectively.

The other main response was from eight students, who indicated that they had particular benefit from the WC in terms of their assignments, their skills, and improvement in their learning. For example, “The reassurance that you are capable of writing well is really great, and the staff answered all my questions really well”. Two students indicated that the WC was particularly helpful for international students or those with English as a second language.

Some responses were vague or somewhat ambivalent. For instance, “I havnt saw any good aspects which provide by the ALL Writing Centre, due to the lecture hasn't give me any feedback of my research paper. As the semester is nearly finished, I give it up already.” This comment suggests that some students are very focussed on particular assignment outcomes, and feel unable to evaluate their interactions with Learning Advisors.

In what ways could the Writing Centre be improved in Semester 2, 2009?

A total of 19 students responded to this question. Four of them said “None” or “nothing”: for example, “i think everything is perfect they do not need to improve anything.” Of the rest of the students, most focussed on the way the service was delivered rather than the actual activities of ALL staff. For instance, two suggested an improved location and physical space (one even wanted a more central location than the Barr Smith Library); two wanted the WC to be open on Fridays; and three wanted to be able to make appointments so as not to have to wait (although one commented that waiting times were not usually that long).

The largest number of respondents (eight) suggested increases to the number of staff and opening hours. For example, “Perhaps, have increased services and staff members as the waiting period can be quite long at times”; “Have a greater range of availability times. The current ones often clash with other contact hours”. This reflects the large and increasing demand for the Writing Centre, as well as students' expectations regarding availability of Learning Advisers. It may also reflect a kind of inverted support for the Writing Centre: students value the service and often feel that by suggesting more staff or opening hours they will help to attract more resources to student development activities. In any case, such responses reinforce the perceived value of, and need for, the service.

Conclusion

In summary, this evaluation confirms the broad approach and strategic direction of the Writing Centre. The modes of promotion currently being pursued are very effective, and there is strong broad agreement among students regarding their satisfaction with the WC. There may be some need to manage expectations about what the WC can offer, and it might be worthwhile developing the WC as a learning and working space so that students are not simply waiting to see a learning advisor. This evaluation, and future evaluations, will be incorporated into a regular cycle of reflection and planning to inform the future practice of Student Development in the CLPD.