



The following material has been drawn and adapted from a *Southern Discourse in the Center* piece spotlighting the Athens State Writing Center.

A Unique Institution

Athens State University is an anomaly of sorts: a two-year junior-senior institution. Billing itself as providing the lowest-cost tuition rate in the state of Alabama, Athens State serves online students and northern Alabama residents who may need to earn an undergraduate education after starting at a community college or after a gap of many years. Composed of three colleges—Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education—Athens State graduates many of the secondary school teachers hired to work in the state and also has a network with government and industry employers in the greater Huntsville area.

According to the 2014 Fact Book, only a quarter of all campus courses at Athens State were held in a traditional, face-to-face format. The unique mixture of non-traditional students and online education here creates opportunities for the Writing Center to provide a sense of connection and community for students who use our services. Yet, finding systematic methods to reach out to students and inform them about our resources is also one of our ongoing challenges.

Continued Growth

Growing from only five sessions in Fall 2011 to nearly 300 in Fall 2012, the Writing Center continues to serve more students every year. Data from the 2015-16 year displayed this kind of positive momentum, with a 66% increase in tutoring sessions from 2014-15 and new student registrations up 70%. From 2015-16 to 2016-17, however, the growth of the Center stagnated, with approximately 500 sessions in both years in the Fall and Spring semesters. Summer tutoring has grown, but the budget can accommodate only limited hours and the contracted nature of the semester can be challenging for establishing evenly spaced tutoring sessions with students over a reasonable timeframe.

As yet, funding is available for only one consultant to be on duty at a time. The Writing Center serves students in every department across campus and our goal is to be open from 9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., with a few hours on Friday; however, we are not always able to remain open for those hours with no gaps each semester. Athens State has recently added graduate programs, and with the addition of these courses, new challenges for tutor training and availability have arisen. All of the peer consultants are currently undergraduates and a proposal for a dedicated graduate tutor (supported by both my direct supervisor, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Provost) was denied funding in the last budget cycle.

Creating Visibility on Campus

The center was moved to the Library Learning Commons from the English Department (located in the oldest building on campus) in 2011 to provide access to information



literacy, technological assistance, and writing support. Although the center was well-placed at the time, the space of the Writing Center was undifferentiated from the rest of the library. In Fall 2016, a glass storefront was installed to create a boundary from the rest of the building and an entrance into the center. More support from Academic Affairs in Spring 2016 allowed for the construction of a room within this space equipped with cameras, a computer and projector, and a group work station.

These successes were possible because I continued to raise awareness about writing process and praxis, initially the work of the QEP, by creating partnerships on campus and increasing the visibility of the Writing Center to students, faculty, administration, and community stakeholders. Presenting a summary of accomplishments to the Board of Trustees in Spring 2016 enabled me to gain resources from Academic Affairs to create a space within the Writing Center to support multimodal tutoring by obtaining equipment for recording presentations and creating graphics to tutor students working in multiple modes. Going forward, the Writing Center is poised to help students through every stage of the writing process, including the senior capstone project and presentation required by many departments for graduation.

Limitations and Support

IT support on campus is limited. Creating innovative solutions to technical problems is difficult in this environment. Students can also be resistant to tips and tools that might help them move forward with their studies. Many sessions must focus in part on very basic skills, such as using and navigating the LMS (Blackboard) to access course materials, understanding assignment prompts, performing basic research (we outsource to librarians after a basic intro), and learning foundational concepts for avoiding plagiarism and using citations.

The administration of Athens State University is approaching a stable phase after a period of uncertainty. Three provosts have served the institution in the last five years. At my urging, the Writing Center Director reporting line was changed after my arrival, so that my position no longer reports to the Director of the Library, but to the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs. The VP for Academic Affairs reports to the Provost. The VP of AA was a co-chair of the QEP on writing; she is very supportive of the Writing Center. After almost two years of vacancy, a new Library Director was hired in November 2016. She has proven to be a reliable collaborator, but many projects have yet to be addressed due to the pressing needs of the library.

Though small, the Writing Center at Athens State continues to grow. Incremental development has allowed us to build the quality of our services while also sustaining and increasing our outreach across campus. Multimodal tutoring affords us many means by which we can support students throughout their academic careers as they pursue online and face-to-face learning opportunities at Athens State and beyond.