We welcomed three new writing assistants this semester: Stefania Flecca, Amanda Connelly and Courtney Luk. Get to know them by reading a bit about each of our newest additions. Make sure you make them feel welcomed!

Meet Our Newest Additions!

Stefania

Hi! My name is Stefania and I am a junior from Old Bridge, New Jersey. I am an English and Secondary Education major with a minor in Italian, and I am studying abroad in Florence, Italy this summer! I am currently the Vice President of Student Government, as well as an Apartment Manager in Maplewood Hall. I love to read, bake, hang out with friends, and laugh!

Amanda

I'm a junior at Monmouth, planning to graduate with an English degree in May 2012. I hope to work in publishing in New York City once I finish here. When I'm not reading and doing my own writing, my main hobby lies in the world of fashion (mainly in the purchasing of shoes I cannot afford or walk in).

Courtney

Courtney is an English major, with a minor in Creative Writing and Journalism. Her hobbies include “spontaneous trips with her friends or family, eating pickles, collecting Converse shoes, Disney marathons, reliving my childhood, panda watching, being a ninja, ghost hunting at MU, NERF wars and basket weaving.”

How to Conclude Tutoring Sessions by Caroline Babula

Sometimes, ending a tutoring session can feel rushed. That hurried feeling can be eliminated by always paying attention to the time. When there are only five or 10 minutes left to the session, let your students know, especially if you do not think it is feasible to finish their papers. At this time, ask the students which paragraph(s) they need the most help with, or if they have any other larger concern, so that you may complete those tasks in the little time you have left. This way, the students are still receiving the help they came to the Writing Center to get, and they can use other lessons they have learned during the session to apply to the paragraphs you did not get to read over together. I’ve found this method to be the best solution when it comes to being short on time.
A Bad Case of the “I don’t knows” by Heather Steimel

Many times at the Writing Center, a student will come in and need help with a specific area of her paper. Maybe she needs help with MLA format. Maybe she knows her paper sounds redundant. Maybe she thinks she could use information on grammar and punctuation. But what do we do when a student comes in and has no idea what she wants you to look at? What do we do when we ask the student what her thesis is, or how she can change her sentence structure, and all we get in response is “I don’t know?”

First, it’s important to figure out why the student has a case of the “I don’t knows.” Is the student required to come here by her teacher? Does she understand the assignment? Does she understand the text the assignment is on? Does she just not care? Once you figure out why the student isn’t engaging with you, it’ll be easier to understand how to go about the session.

When a student doesn’t seem to be responding, always ask questions. For example, what is the main focus of your paper? What is the topic of this paragraph? What are you actually trying to say here? Directing questions toward the student allows her to take ownership of what is on the page. It also enables you to have a conversation, possibly making the student more comfortable. At the very least, the student becomes involved in the session. An important thing to remember when engaging the student with questioning is that silence is golden. Sometimes you just need to shut up. The first few seconds of silence can be awkward, even painful, especially if you asked the student a direct question and she still isn’t responding. Just wait. Don’t be the first to talk. This may be harder for some Writing Assistants than others but stick with it. The student feels awkward, too, and believes me, eventually she will open up.

Also, you can always give the student your own suggestions. Many Writing Assistants may feel uncomfortable formulating ideas with the student, especially if the Writing Assistant is unfamiliar with the subject matter at hand. Don’t worry about it. We’re not supposed to be experts at everything. Sometimes I like to lean back in my chair, away from the paper, and just brainstorm with the student. I throw out lots of ideas or issues I think the student should think about. Even if I haven’t read Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus I could still ask the student, is there any imagery found repeatedly through the play? How are the women in the play treated? Does the main character have a tragic flaw? What is Shakespeare trying to accomplish with the ending? Of course, if I haven’t read the play, I won’t know the answers to these questions, but I’m still encouraging the student to think critically about the text, and I may even be giving her ideas on what to write about.

It’s important to recognize that every session is different and sometimes, if a student continually says she “doesn’t know” what’s wrong with her paper, it may be because she’s not confident with her writing skills. Try to point out what the student is doing well. You can always tell a student to go back to the text. Encourage her to read critically and take a lot of marginal notes. Have her write an outline, or a reverse outline, if the paper’s already done.

And don’t be afraid to ask for help. I’m here three days a week, and I ask someone for help at least two out of those three days. Whether I’m asking Jane a question, or another Writing Assistant, I know that I can always turn to someone if I need something. We all have the common goal of making the Writing Center the best it can be.

The Leap into College Level Writing by Samantha Wilson

As a tutor, I constantly come into contact with first-year students who approach an essay with the “five paragraph” concept. As I was only in high school two years ago, I know from personal experience that many high school English classes are geared toward fitting an essay into five paragraphs: an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Once students enter college, however, they are unsure as to how to expand essays beyond these five units. There are different ways to manage this problem during a session with a student.

To steer a student toward an expanded essay, I ask them to write down any ideas they have that connect to the assignment. If they verbalize that they want three points, I suggest that he or she not feel limited by that essay format; the student should write down any supporting statements that come to mind. It is also common for a student to have many different points that defend the thesis; and in turn, he or she tries to cram the ideas into the constricting five paragraph format. When I see this occur, I recommend that it is, in fact, acceptable to write more than five paragraphs. Students often seem relieved to know that they can break apart their paragraphs to separate the ideas. It is rewarding to see the relief on students’ faces when they realize that taking the leap into college-level writing is not as challenging as they predicted.
Advisement on Getting Students to Relax...

We Don't Bite! We're Just Here to Help You Write! by Joselyn McClatchey

As many of us know, though some of us do not, working at the Writing Center can bring many challenges. However, we should not look at these challenges as obstacles in our way but obstacles to make us stronger as writers and as people. From my personal experience, I know one obstacle that was always hard for me to face: getting the tutee to relax. When a tutee walks in shy, not talkative and with his or her head down; your first reaction as a writing assistant is “Oh gosh, what am I going to do?” If not this specific reaction, then maybe you’ve had one similar to that. Building a relationship in a half hour or an hour session isn’t an easy task, but it is clearly not impossible. Through my experience working at the Writing Center, I have gained some tools to guide me on how to relax and gain trust in the tutee at hand.

When approaching a new tutee, always say “Hi! My name is ___.” Even though Jeanne calls out your name while your tutee is walking in, it never hurts to reinforce a friendly, welcoming gesture. Shake hands with your tutee (if you’re comfortable), so you establish that you’re not out to scare him or her. While in the room, ask some comforting questions like: “How are you?”, “How is the class going?”...Make comments when appropriate, such as “Oh yes, I know it’s tough, but don’t worry; we’re here to help!” I’ve always noted positive feedback from the students I interact with in the beginning of a session, even the shyest of the bunch. So don’t panic; YOU need to be relaxed before the tutee can be. Smile, laugh when applicable and try and keep your tone of voice to one as if you were in conversation with a friend, but never forget that you are still the tutor!

More methods to get tutees to relax... by Kaitlyn Roberts

My mother always tells me, “Kate, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” I find this saying to be true in my everyday life as well as in the Writing Center. We’ve all had those students who seem like they would be more comfortable getting a root canal than talking with us. They give one word answers and say as little as possible during tutoring sessions. In my experience, their silence and tentative demeanor make me just as uncomfortable in the session as they are.

To remedy this awkward situation, I try and get my students talking and comfortable right from the start. I’ll greet them with a huge smile (which I believe is a very important tool) and ask them questions about how their day is going, how they like their classes this semester, and if the student happens to be a girl, I may compliment her on her jewelry or an article of clothing. I use the same technique during my sessions as well. If there is something in the student’s paper that I identify personally with, I may point it out and talk to them about my experience. I find that in most cases this method is effective. There will always be students who refuse to open up, but I try my best not to let it get me down. Some people are just shy!

Sometimes there is no way of getting around it; you just have to complete the session, help the student as much as you can, and send him/her on their way. No matter how the session goes or how responsive the student is, I always make sure to say “Have a nice day!” and give him/her the same big smile that greeted them.

We’ve all had those students who seem like they would be more comfortable getting a root canal than talking with us.

Did You Know? By Greg Montagnino

What is a Participle? It is a VERBAL that is used as an adjective. A verbal is a word that is based on a verb but does not act as a verb when used in this context. A participle modifies either a noun or a pronoun. For example: The BARKING dog wanted to come inside. (The participle is barking which modifies the noun dog).
Writing Center Alumni Updates

Shannon Hennessey Littlehale
Worked at The Writing Center from 9/06-5/08

So much has happened since my time at the Writing Center came to an end in 2008. I got a job shortly after graduation as the Assistant Manager at Ten Thousand Villages in Red Bank. This past May I was married to a wonderful website developer, Matthew Littlehale. We purchased a house in Long Branch, and we have two cats: Judah and Levi. I still can be found working in Red Bank at Ten Thousand Villages, only now I am the Store Manager! Although my work keeps me busy, I always find time to serve. I am a member of the Fair Trade Red Bank steering committee. I also work closely with my husband in planning and running our church’s annual missions trip to the Dominican Republic.

I often look back on and am thankful for my time spent at the Writing Center. Believe it or not, my experience there has shaped me more for the work I am doing today than most of my classes did! The skills that can be learned at the Writing Center are not just how to help someone improve his or her writing, but - more importantly even - how to effectively communicate ideas and concepts with another person, how to offer constructive critique gently and with confidence, and how to run an office (when Jeanne goes to lunch)! I’m so glad to have had this experience.

Christina Wanis Lee
Worked at The Writing Center from 10/06-8/09

This past summer (July 16th) I married my high school sweetheart of 7 years. We had the wedding in Hazlet, NJ. Currently, I am a Substitute teacher for the Keansburg Public School District and the Matawan-Aberdeen schools. I tutor Middle school students during the week, as well. I am also enrolled at Monmouth University in the TSD (Teachers of Students with Disabilities) certificate program. When I am not working or composing assignments for school, I am learning how to play the piano and training for a half marathon with my husband.

Suzanne Rauso
Worked at The Writing Center from 1/06-10/07

I am still working at Brookdale in two different part-time jobs. I am an Adjunct in the English Department; I have taught freshman English Composition 121, Business Writing 127, Technical Writing 225, and Basic Skills Writing 095. I also work in the Counseling Department as an Academic Advisor, helping students with their planning, scheduling, transferring, and other needs. I love both the classroom and the one-on-one environments, and my experience in the Writing Center helps in both.
Writing Center Alumni Updates

Neva Pontoriero
Worked at The Writing Center from 6/06-2/10

I recently graduated from Monmouth University for the fourth time, having completed my Master of Arts in English with a concentration in literature in January 2011. I will be presenting my thesis on American novelist John Dos Passos at a national literature conference in April and plan on expanding my research into a book-length project in the near future. For the past year, I have also been employed as the Coordinator of Supplemental Instruction at Monmouth University. In my new position, I am responsible for implementing and supervising a non-traditional academic assistance program that fosters peer-facilitated learning experiences for students in high-risk courses. I still maintain a close connection to the Writing Center and credit my experience as a Writing Assistant with fostering both my passion for higher education and my success in working with college students.

Lance Eastwood
Worked at The Writing Center from 9/04-5/05

Beginning in February 2006, I worked as a contract Program Analyst in the United States Marshals Service (USMS), Investigative Operations Division (IOD). In that role, I was responsible for providing management support to the Assistant Director/Deputy Assistant Director of IOD, conducting statistical analyses, and assisting in the management of national-level fugitive apprehension initiatives.

In February 2009, I accepted a full-time government position and transferred to the executive staff of the USMS Director. While in that position, I was responsible for composing, proofing, and managing the flow of executive-level correspondence (i.e. memoranda, policy statements, responses to Congressional inquiries, etc.) for the Director's Office. I was also responsible for coordinating certain projects with the Department of Justice and the Offices of the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General.

In December 2010, I transferred to the USMS-led National Sex Offender Targeting Center (NSOTC). Established by the USMS following the passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, the NSOTC is an interagency intelligence and operations center responsible for assisting federal, state, local, and tribal jurisdictions with identifying, locating, apprehending, and prosecuting sex offenders who fail to comply with registration requirements. The NSOTC is comprised of three organizational groups; the Operations Unit, the Behavioral Analysis Unit, and the Intelligence Unit. As a criminal intelligence analyst, I am assigned to the Intelligence Unit and am primarily responsible for identifying information on the possible location of fugitive sex offenders.

CHECK BACK FOR MORE WRITING CENTER ALUMNI UPDATES IN THE NEXT ISSUE!