

Peer tutoring offers student-to-student help

By Sara Pardys
STAFF WRITER

Campus tutoring programs offer UNC Asheville students a reliable source of both help and employment in many different disciplines.

"I can't imagine having a better job in college," said Rob Waskom, employee at the University Writing Center and junior interdisciplinary student.

Waskom said a typical session at the Writing Center is a form of non-directive or feminist teaching methodologies, which allow the clients to be in control of their own writing.

"A typical session involves reviewing an assignment description, talking about how the writing has gone so far, identifying trouble spots, reading a paper out loud and then going back to work out the kinks," Waskom said.

Jada Bryson, senior drama student, attends French tutoring sessions with Mary Hes, senior biology and foreign languages student. Bryson, who needed to take a French class in order to graduate, said she sees her tutoring sessions as a way to practice outside of class. She said she finds the sessions quite helpful.

"I am more comfortable in class," Bryson said. "Tutoring takes some of the stress off."

Waskom said he uses his experiences in the University Writing Center to better understand the writing process.

"I've been a tutor for close to four semesters now," Waskom said. "That means I've seen all kinds of writers working on all kinds of writing, and I've been able to whittle down to the core of what really gives people trouble with writing. Basically, nobody thinks the way we write. If your thought process worked in 14-page essays, you'd probably be insane."

Waskom said although he recognizes people have different ways of thinking, the results of thought processes can be the same in academic writing.

"I tend to think spatially or conversationally, and I've developed ways to turn my thought process into a linear paper. I often draw maps of my papers to help me reorganize ideas and develop a thesis by the second or third draft. My sister, on the other hand, is very mathematical and needs to have a thesis and outline before she can start writing. But the results are pretty similar," Waskom said.

In the University Writing Center, students work with their own thought process in order to write and revise academic papers.

"At its best, academic writing exists so that anyone can turn their thoughts into a product that anybody else can translate into their thought process. Sometimes people need to have their worries broken down into manageable chunks, and I've become pretty good at that," Waskom said.

Though Bryson said her tutoring improved her work ethic, the program could also improve if tutors were allowed to tutor for more than just two hours a week.

"I think it should be up to the tutor and the tutee," she said.

Waskom said he also sees room for improvement in his tutoring program.

"Like anything successful, the University Writing Center deserves more funding. By this point in the semester, our appointments are often full a week in advance," he said. "It's really hard turning people away at the door. We've been really successful in our new space in the library, but the demand for appointments definitely over-stretches our workforce."



JESSICA BLYTHIE - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A peer tutor helps a fellow student with her math homework in the Math Lab, located on the third floor of Rhodes Robinson. The University Writing Center also provides peer tutoring by appointment in Ramsey Library. The University Peer Tutoring Program offers tutors for a variety of subjects and courses, including foreign languages, math, chemistry, computer science, French, humanities, music and economics.

UNC Asheville's peer tutoring program offers tutoring through drop-in tutorial centers in accounting, classics, chemistry, physics and Spanish, according to the UNC Asheville advising Web site. Tutors work with students on an individual basis for 100 and 200 level courses in astronomy, biology, computer science, economics, environmental studies, French, humanities, management, multimedia arts and sciences, music, Portuguese and psychology.

Waskom said tutoring programs serve as a great example of the liberal arts in action.

"I'm constantly learning at work. I also have the opportunity to meet new people every day. And, of course, I've learned a whole lot about the way that I write, and therefore, the way that I communicate with the world," Waskom said. "I've been able to work on a crucial skill set for myself at the University Writing Center, and that's something that will benefit me for years."

Tutoring in the University Writing Center has other great perks, according to Waskom.

"Everyone can benefit from looking at something from a new perspective," he said.

"Additionally, I think of tutoring as an extension of service-learning, which is an essential part of our education. It's important to think of making a contribution to your community as being a part of your day-to-day life."

For more information on the University Peer Tutoring program, visit www.unca.edu/advising/peer_tutoring.htm. To make an appointment or for more information at the University Writing Center, visit www.unca.edu/uwc.

Office

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faculty, it is more often about current courses and assignments. However, both students and professors experience miscommunication and no-shows when making appointments to meet outside of class.

"One time when I did set an appointment with a professor, I got there and 30 minutes later, he came in to tell me he was in a meeting," Carver said.

Professors also tend to encounter students who don't show up for scheduled appointments, according to Snyder. She experienced trouble in her attempts to set up conferences with each student from a given class outside of the regular meeting time.

"When I've set aside a time for students to show up and meet for 10 or 15 minutes, I'd say about 20 to 25 percent show up for the scheduled appointments," Snyder said.

Most students agreed that professors made more attempts and encouraged them to attend office hours during their freshman years. Language 120 instructors often required students to come to office hours to receive feedback, according to Carver.

"I wish more students would drop by during office hours," Wood said.

Wood said he tells his students about office hours at the beginning of the semester, but doesn't have the hours posted on his door, as some professors do.

"I always feel welcome to come to office hours. My teachers are very encouraging and tell us to come visit," Engler said. "But I usually just e-mail if I need something."

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