



RESEARCH DEPARTMENT



Santa Ana College Writing Assignment Survey Results

December 2008

The English/ESL department is considering seeking a grant for possible expansion of the services in the Writing Center. Currently, due to limited funds, the Center's drop-in service is limited to students enrolled in English or ESL composition classes. However, a growing number of SAC students are seeking help with writing assignments in other disciplines. In an effort to accommodate those needs, an online survey was administered to faculty. A total of 106 instructors responded to this survey.

Summary of Findings

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents consider that the expansion of the services provided by the Writing Center as being very important to assist students. Respondents mostly teach subjects such as English (21%), Counseling (8%), Chemistry and Math (each 7%), ELS/EMLS and Speech Communication (each 5%). The largest group of respondents teach classes with an average of 20-30 students (49%) followed by classes with 31-40 students (26%).

- Most respondents (89%) stated that they require outside-of-class writing assignments for their courses.
- Respondents stated that they prefer to assign short essays (66%), journal/questions responses (61%), summaries/critiques of newspapers, journals, articles (53%) and research/documented papers (45%).
- If the services offered by the Writing Center are expanded, respondents stated that they would, overall, assign the same types of assignments as before, with slightly fewer journal assignments and slightly more research assignments.
- Most respondents (83%) stated that they would consider assigning writing in their classes if they could receive tips for quick and easy grading of those assignments.
- Most respondents (87%) would consider attending short workshop(s) on how to develop writing assignments and on how to grade/assess such an assignment.

Readers are encouraged to read the comments below as faculty-respondents were very thoughtful in sharing their struggles of teaching students with limited writing skills, their support for additional services and even their willingness to participate in working towards a solution.

Detailed Responses:

Which subject do you teach?

21%	English	3%	Biology
8%	Counseling	3%	Psychology
7%	Chemistry	2%	Fire Technology
7%	Math	2%	Anthropology
3%	History	2%	Study Skills
3%	Dance	21%	Other subjects

What is the typical class size maximum?

49%	20-30
26%	31-40
11%	41-50
6%	51-60
3%	61-80
1%	81-100
4%	101 +

Do you require outside-of-class writing assignments for your course?

89%	Yes
1%	No

What types of assignment do you assign:

66%	Short essays, 1-2 pages
45%	Research/documented papers, 3-10 pages
61%	Journal/question responses
53%	Summaries/critiques of newspapers, journals, articles, etc.
19%	Lab reports
30%	Problem-solving explanations
3%	Clinical reports
15%	Other (paragraphs, letters and memos, news writings, written observation report, autobiographical statement, historical analysis of original sources, concert reports & maps, project descriptions, document brainstorming processes, cover letters, resumes, thank you notes, book analyses, dance/concert critique)

If we were able to expand the Writing Center to help your students, which of the following assignment would you assign?

66%	Short essays, 1-2 pages
49%	Research/documented papers, 3-10 pages
48%	Journal/question responses
51%	Summaries/critiques of newspapers, journals, articles, etc.
14%	Lab reports
35%	Problem-solving explanations
2%	Clinical reports
12%	Other (technical writing, paragraphs, web assignments; analytical writing, MLA Workshops, concept maps, project descriptions, document brainstorming processes, cover letters, resumes, thank you notes)

If additional writing assignments would be a burden, would you consider assigning writing in your classes if you could receive tips for quick and easy grading of those assignments?

83%	Yes
17%	No

Would you consider attending short workshop(s) on how to develop a writing assignment?

87% Yes
13% No

Would you consider attending short workshop(s) on how to grade/assess such an assignment?

87% Yes
13% No

Please check one of the following which reflects your opinion of how important or needed such expanded Writing Center services would be:

63% Very important
17% Important
16% Useful
0% Not very important
4% I am not interested in these services

Additional comments/suggestions you would like to share with us.

- Please include tips on how to explain plagiarism to students and how to discourage this practice.
- The more we can help our students with reading and writing the better. I would also like to see a reading lab opened as well and staffed by reading instructors. Many of our students have trouble with grammar, but I still find that the majority of the problems that I encounter in my writing classes stem from poor reading skills, especially since all of my assignments are reading-based.
- I am not sure how helpful the Writing Center would be to my students. I have had no experience with the help supplied to the students. Scientific writing and referencing is very different than that done for an English class. My students may receive conflicting advice. I also know that my students desperately need more practice writing. I required more written assignments when I started but grading is overwhelming. I do need suggestions (and software) for scanning for plagiarism and originality.
- I appreciate any and all efforts to improve the writing skills of our students.
- I am on board and will help any way I can!
- The workshops would be great.
- I find the quality of my student's writing to be very poor; I feel like they are handing me their rough draft. I recognize many of my students are ESL or EMLS students but I am honestly shocked at the quality I receive. I would LOVE to have access to the workshops you mention and the ability to refer students for review and assistance with their papers. I also know that if I knew how to better evaluate written assignments I would probably require more (if I felt it was going to take less of my time to evaluate).
- Plagiarism of writing assignments has become a huge topic, especially with cut and paste using internet resources. Proper citation of resources used in the paper is another issue. Could these topics be put in student and faculty workshops?
- The Writing Center is a scheduling burden for my students that already have a hard time fitting my class time into their work schedule. There needs to be alternative methods on how to meet the hour requirement. Possibilities include an independent study model where a student is just given a packet of writing development assignments and then goes over it with a tutor or a hybrid online model where the student shows up four times mandatory and does online work. I believe in the purpose of the writing center, but the rigidness of the course was hard on my students that work from 8-5 in Diamond Bar and have to drive to SAC from far.
- With so many ESL students in my Business Calculus, they have a hard time writing a sentence to explain /interpret their results. Any help would be good!
- This would be especially helpful for those teaching more traditional semester long classes. Student writing skills seem to be lacking and this would be helpful.
- I would like to be able to refer students to the Writing Center for help with their writing style regardless of whether they are taking an English class.

- Students really need the Writing Center as a place to go to get individual help with their writing. With the Writing Center structured as it currently is, there is not always space or an available instructor for students to ask for help. Also, many students have confided that they feel they're "interrupting a class" if they go to the Writing Center to get help with an assignment.
- I struggle with the writing skills of my students, but I am not an English teacher. I think it would be an invaluable asset to provide these types of services to both the instructors and the students.
- Please expand your drop-in services to include classes outside of English and ESL. My students very much need your support.
- I teach in a cohort with an English 061-101 teacher and the Writing Center is an integral part of the success of our class.
- Many of our students have poor writing skills. This includes the ability to express their thoughts, spelling, and grammar. Any place that they can go to improve those skills is beneficial to all of us. I would certainly hope that all English and ESL teachers would make good use of this center.
- I actually consider writing to be very important and I'm glad I took your survey. It has made me reconsider how I might add more writing assignments.
- Many of my students are ESL, but most 18-24 yrs. just need to write more to improve this needed vocational skill and/or transfer ready for university...part of my fashion courses student outcome expectations. The support of a campus writing center is needed since the campus expects writing projects in all of our classes, not just in English.
- I would like a class for students to learn how to correctly use "work cites" in MLA or APA formats.
- Perhaps we could have a Writing Center Coordinator and English faculty member at all times during the open hours of Writing Center, and have tutors in subject areas (psychology, anthropology, history, etc) only during limited time, say twenty hours a week.
- This would be very helpful. Details of how to assign and how to grade written work our outside our professional training and must be invented by each teacher. We help each other, but assistance from experts would indeed be useful.
- I have found the writing skills within the introductory courses severely lacking, these students are ill-prepared to complete writing assignments at college level. It is very frustrating to be grading writing assignments only for content with disregard to poor grammar skills.
- I think the Writing Center at SAC would be much improved if it was able to provide more one-on-one or small group tutoring. I hope that the Writing Center gets the funding it deserves.
- A campus-wide writing center is a must-have for any college! It is important for students of all disciplines to learn how to write better.
- As someone intimately involved in the writing center, I would like to see it concentrate more on essay instead of fiction. Instead of assigning one or two books, could we not make a more modular curriculum whereby we could teach them short fiction, personal narrative essays, and more formal essays together.
- I have limited experience with assessment of writing; especially with regard to using assessment to help the student's future performance. The workshops mentioned would be extremely valuable.
- I'd like to see an expansion of the Writing Center to include tutoring for all levels of writing classes. Tutors should be trained in the standard practices of writing centers, ie. focus on high level concerns, rather than acting as editors for student papers.
- I have seen students from all courses struggle with writing tests and papers. I think expanding the Writing Center is extremely urgent.
- Presently access to the Writing Center for English 101 and above students is so restricted that the writing center is essentially useless as a resource for these students.
- It's very difficult for me to answer this survey in a meaningful way since I do not know how impacted the Writing Center is currently. I encourage my students to utilize all such campus resources, but I don't know if they chose to. I also don't know if they want to, but cannot be assisted, etc. In short, I need more information.

- When informally surveying students regarding their perceptions of problems here at SAC for a problem solution project, the limited services provided by the Writing Center ranks in the top three. So, students believe that we could better serve their needs by expanding the writing center. Plus, if we (faculty) are focused on increasing the Basic Skill levels of our student, many of us would jump at the opportunity to figure out how we could better achieve that goal through services provided to us. It is critical that we better serve the needs of our 1.5 generation students that make up such a large portion of our population.
- Expanding the Writing Center in this way is a great idea. (2)
- There is a tremendous need for writing help across the campus. Would it be possible to have a drop in service for writing help? Perhaps you could limit the amount of time per student. I am often asked to just read the essay and see if there are any glaring errors by my student workers. They do not qualify to use the writing center.
- There is a definite need for writing support for students. Students struggle to express themselves clearly and correctly in writing that I have recently backed off giving writing assignments.
- Within my classroom I supply students with the techniques and the information to become proficient writers. Unfortunately, not all students are receptive.
- I've always viewed the Writing Center as a resource to struggling writers. If the writing center is to be expanded, then the focus should be serving students on a one-to-one format.
- I would be open to serving on a committee that creates common assessments and rubrics for grading those assessments; yet, it would be unfortunate if Writing Center funds were appropriated for this purpose rather than the hiring of tutors who could give a struggling writer the attention s/he might need.
- It would be great if the writing center was available for students in any class to go in and have their written work proof read/assist with editing of rough draft.
- Many of my students have utilized the Writing Center and I believe there is direct correlation between the usage of the Writing Center and their success on my assignments. I encourage my students to take advantage of the Writing Center.
- It would help to have a place to send students for a review of their papers before they turn them in to the teacher.
- On-line services such as turnitin.com are very useful and helpful for quick communication between students and instructors in writing assignments. I used this service at other colleges I teach at such as Fullerton and Cypress Community College.
- Reading and expressing clear ideas in writing/speaking are the foundation of success in college, assuming they are motivated to succeed!
- By and large, their writing is atrocious, but I do not have the time (or expertise) to help them much with it so I mostly grade the content. When the grammar and spelling has to be perfect, like with cover letters, I practically write it for them. (I know this is not good, but it's better than them NOT having the resume or cover letter.) If the college had a writing center, I'd instruct them to have their papers reviewed by the center's staff prior to turning them into me.
- I would love to have the Writing Center expanded. I am involved in the Freshmen Experience program and feel that it is a valuable service to our students and support it in any way possible. I have tried to give my students extra credit by going to the Writing Center for my (other than English) classes, but are turned away because of the current limitations. I am all for expansion. Thank you for all of your assistance to our students.
- My understanding is that right now only students enrolled in English writing classes can use the center. In proposing to expand the Writing Center, will you allow all students to have access?
- I think the expanded service is important for most students however my classes are more technically oriented and have very few if any writing assignments.