



Winter 2014

# NEWS FROM THE WRITING CENTERS

## Announcements

### Dates To Remember

March 13–15, 2014  
TESOL Arabia Dubai

June 12–14, 2014  
IWCA Conference Minn., USA

November 7–8, 2014  
MENAWCA Conference  
Canadian University of Dubai, UAE

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#### The new MENAWCA Executive Board for 2013-2015 (in alphabetical order by first name)

Amy Zenger: Webmaster (Lebanon)  
Barb Toth: Member-at-Large (Saudi)  
vacant: Vice- President  
Jodi Lefort: Public Relations Officer (Oman)  
Khalid Abalhasan: Member-at-Large (Saudi)  
Mark Hill: Past President (UAE)  
Molly McHarg: President (Qatar)  
Paula Hayden: Past Conference Chair (Qatar)  
Sherry Ward: Treasurer and Newsletter Ed. (Qatar)  
Tony Schiera: Exec. Secretary & IWCA Rep. (Oman)

- ⇒ The annual general meeting for MENAWCA will take place during the TESOL Arabia conference! We encourage all MENAWCA members to attend and participate. The meeting will be held from 7 –8 p.m. on Friday March 14 in the Emerald Room at the Hyatt.
- ⇒ There was a recent Affiliate Agreement between MENAWCA and TESOL Arabia. This agreement formally acknowledges our professional relationship from December 2013 to December 2016, at which point we hope to renew the agreement.
- ⇒ The 20th TESOL Arabia International Conference & Exhibition will take place between 13th—15th March 2014. More info can be found at the link below.

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS: MENAWCA 2014

#### *Sustaining Writing and Writing Centers in the Middle East-North Africa Region*

As writing centers grow in the MENA region, questions emerge not only about how to sustain and develop them but also about how they can serve as model centers. What strategies can and should regional writing centers adopt in order to establish a solid presence within institutional frameworks? How can peer tutors, international collaborations, local/regional research initiatives drive the momentum? What technological initiatives, including use of mobile devices, influence our effectiveness with student writers and as we network with other centers? What theories and practices that grow out of local contexts can promote writing center work both within the MENA region and with other local, regional, and international writing forums? This conference aims to identify multi-faceted variables that promote the sustainability of writing programs, writing centers, and most importantly the dialogue between writers.

The MENAWCA invites students, teachers and other professionals who support student writers to its biennial conference, **November 7-8, 2014 at the Canadian University in Dubai**. Please don't delay. **Deadline for Submissions: April 15th, 2014**. Go to <http://www.menawca.org> for more info!



## IWCA Updates

By Tony Schiera

- 1) **Writing Center Journal Live:** Monthly PD interactive e-session highlighting a recent *WCJ* article and its author(s). More info can be found at the link below.

<http://writingcenters.org/2013/09/the-writing-center-journal-announces-wcj-live-our-new-online-professional-development-series/>

- 2) **The IWCA board is sponsoring a new mentor matching program** to provide mentorship opportunities for writing center administrators. We hope that the program can facilitate a variety of mentor/mentee relationships. Mentor responsibilities may include referring mentees to resources, connecting them with colleagues regionally and (inter)nationally, consulting on professional development, and providing feedback on assessment and scholarship. Mentors may also serve as outside reviewers for writing center assessment, references for promotion, and chairs on conference panels. Mentors and mentees will define the parameters of their relationship, including how and how often to communicate. If you are interested in serving as a mentor, please fill out the mentor survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IWCAMentor>.

If you are interested in being assigned a mentor, please fill out the mentee survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IWCAMentee>.

The mentor matching committee will then pair mentors and mentees with similar interests and backgrounds, put them in contact with each other, and suggest guidelines for a productive mentoring relationship.

If you have any questions, contact the chair of the mentor matching committee, Chris LeCluyse, at [cle-cluyse@westminstercollege.edu](mailto:cle-cluyse@westminstercollege.edu) or call 801-832-2417.

To sign up as a mentor or mentee, one must be a member of IWCA.

- 3) **IWCA Conference 2014** Conference: Coronado Springs Resort (Disney in Florida) on October 31-Nov 1. Melissa lanetta and Brian Fallon will chair. Website and call for papers coming.

- 4) **IWCA SI 2014:** <http://www.iwcasummerinstitute.org/> The Summer Institute is a great way to meet with other writing center professionals and share ideas among other very enriching and thought provoking ideas about writing center administration and research. This year's theme is Exploring the Writing Center as Craft.

I attended the SI in June 2013 and really feel this was worth the money (paid for it out of pocket). Each day the group works together around a theme in such a way that deep and applicable learning about the various areas including writing center history, research, tutor training and education, praxis, development and collaboration, to name only some of the topics. I came away from the SI with a research agenda for this academic year and concrete ways I can improve access to services through ideas exchanged with colleagues in attendance. It's also a great way to network and make connections with other writing center like-minded people that made me feel like we weren't just the only ones on the planet doing this! If you have the professional development budget or the cash on hand, I highly recommend this whether you are new to writing center admin work or an seasoned veteran. If you are interested, start early! This is a limited-space event, usually capping off at 40. I sent my information in about this time last year and barely got a spot: <http://www.iwcasummerinstitute.org/index.html>

- 5) **Get your writing center listed on the Writing Center Directory.** Visit this link <http://web.stcloudstate.edu/writeplace/wcd/index.html>, check to see if your center is listed (on the left, by country), and send an email according to instructions on the main page.



## The UC Writing Center and the American Corner: A Story of Collaboration and Success

By : Djalal Tebib, Writing Center Director/Tutor, Doctoral Teaching Assistant, University Constantine 1- Algeria

Inspired by writing centers around the globe and motivated by the will to make a difference, last year, I launched a writing center for EFL students in an Algerian university. The writing center aims to nurture a love for writing among students and convince them that writing is no ogre, but a Cinderella instead. The majority of EFL learners at Constantine 1 University (Algeria) have an aversion to writing and are 'very weak' at it according to a study we conducted a few years ago. Therefore, we decided to intervene and provide the necessary 'antidote' for such alarming academic behaviour. Starting the center was almost impossible for I was alone and without any resources. Still I was ready to go the extra mile to make the writing center a reality: I am aware of its importance and benefits. I knocked on many doors, but no one opened except the American Corner Constantine (ACC) which is a library-like space in which students taste American culture; it is sponsored by the American embassy in Algiers.

The relationship of the UC Writing Center and the American Corner Constantine started last year when the writing center was still fresh and in sore need of assistance. Luckily, the American Corner Constantine was there ready to support, adopt and even pamper the newly-born center. The Corner provided the UC Writing Center with all the necessary materials, viz. printing supplies, dictionaries, books and audio-visual aids, which made the center's mission possible. At that time, the writing center was unprecedented at the University of Constantine and in all Algerian Universities, thus convincing students of its importance and value was the hardest of our tasks. Again, the center benefited from the reputation and renown of the American corner and gained the trust of hundreds of students. In a short period of time, the center has become the students' favourite space as it helps them learn, practise and have fun at the same time. The UC Writing Center is now well-known among students of all levels, and it is flourishing because it added needed vigour to the learners' academic lives.



The UC Writing Center offers a variety of services such as one-on-one tutoring and research assistance at no charge. It also organizes a wide range of workshops and events; listed below are the most significant ones:

- **AI fresco Writing:** an out-of- classroom event in which students go outside, with a tutor, to enjoy the breeze and write creative essays in the arms of nature (usually in spring).
- **Documentary-Based Learning:** As the title may suggest, this activity is based on documentaries. We use a variety of educational documentaries to teach students new vocabulary, critical thinking, research methodology and many other skills. Students usually write short summaries about the documentary at the end of the session, after a group discussion. ( We use the audio-visual aids of the ACC)



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- **Short-Story Writing:** a series of workshops that aim at helping students write short stories and learn from the experience.
- **Hybrid Writing:** In this activity, students are invited to write collaboratively to enhance collaborative learning skills. It aims to demonstrate that writing is a process and feedback is all-important.
- **Cub Reporters:** The purpose of this is to train students how to interview people, ask effective questions and enhance their analytical skills. Students are taken to an orphanage or elderly care home to play the role of a reporter and learn more about report-writing. After the event, each student is expected to write a long report and/or a story about the experience. (Always with the collaboration of the ACC).

In addition to the aforementioned activities and events, the UC Writing Center team in collaboration with the American Corner Constantine organizes competitions, games, mini-lessons and many other interesting activities. Student attendance at the UC WC is approximately 30 per session and 35 per event.

To keep in touch with students, the UC WC has a Facebook page and an email address to receive students work, suggestions and feedback. The UC page has more than 400 friends providing them with e-books, new words, newspaper articles, short stories, idiomatic expressions, etc. The foremost goal of the UC page is to put students in touch with writing and reading. It simply wants to say that learning doesn't end in the classroom.



In conclusion, a big thank you to the American Corner Constantine and thereby to the American embassy in Algiers for their overwhelming support and excellent services. The UC Writing Center would have never been able to survive without their assistance. Supported by the love of thousands of students, the writing center will certainly continue to exist and grow.

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## An Emergency Virtual Writing Center

By Radheya Visperas and Molly McHarg

For the first time in history, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar) conducted an emergency drill to test the possibility of virtual teaching in the event of an unexpected university closure. From the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year, faculty and students were advised that the university would be closed for two consecutive days in November; the dates were not specified. Faculty and students were mandated to continue with classes in a synchronous, virtual teaching environment. Some technology platforms, such as Blackboard Collaborate and Google Hangouts, were supported by VCUQatar's IT Department and Teaching with Technology Task force, but faculty were permitted to choose and utilize any platform they deemed appropriate for their courses.

On Saturday, November 16, an SMS message was sent to all VCUQatar employees and students notifying them that the building would be closed on November 17 and 18 for virtual teaching days. The Writing Center (TWC) had prepared informational brochures and conducted outreach in advance to alert students that TWC would also be engaged in this virtual learning process through Google Hangouts.

Despite planning and easy access to computer technology, this experience taught us, both the TWC staff and students, that spontaneity and patience are very important in the workplace. During the emergency shut down of the physical campus, I received two appointments from students who were very anxious about completing their papers. Unfortunately, the Internet service was very poor that day due to bad weather. It was a coincidence that the closure occurred during this time, which made it more difficult for us to contact each other than when we had had a run through on the system a few days earlier.

Google Hangouts was a new communication system for all of us and we struggled to find each other's emails to conduct a call. After managing to rectify the situation by sending numerous emails to each other, we finally conducted a rather "normal" session. Doha is a conservative country and not everyone is willing to do webcam sessions, but I was more than happy that the tutees were willing to approach this in an open-minded way. Most of the time we shared our screen using the Google Screenshare option so that I

could see her screen with her word document, and she could see mine with notes and a few pointers for her essay. We also discussed her concerns with the draft through the Call option. I was amazed at how the session seemed like the usual face-to-face conversation. It was very pleasing to see the eagerness of students to learn despite a difficult time sorting out technological problems. It was then I realized how valuable the Writing Center really is. The problems with computers, Internet and troubleshooting were nothing compared to the positive responses I received from the students I had conducted sessions with.

An appointment was normally 30 minutes long; however, during this event, we had to extend the sessions for about an hour to make up for lost time and troubleshooting. They were very persistent and eager to listen to my advice in order to write a better paper, and I was excited on what would be the outcome of the session. In normal face-to-face tutoring sessions, I used to feel a sense of dependence and nervousness from the tutees. However, during the virtual sessions, they seemed more comfortable and at ease communicating. It would likely be the setting – the comfort of their own home. I realized that, yes, if I were in their position, I would feel the same way. I felt more in my element because of the psychological feeling of safety - being physically far from strangers. They even felt more confident writing the paper as I could not physically see them write or type. It surprised me this way, as they are normally hesitant to express their ideas during one-on-one conversations.

My strategy was to discuss the students' main concerns for their paper, make bullet points of what they needed to re-write (after having a good look at what they had previously written) and then leave them for a five minute interval to write and re-write their ideas. I checked on them once in a while, as I cheered them up with a few jokes. I noticed how effective this was because the students were more productive, and less shy. I told them one thing – to keep writing, ignore the spelling mistakes and grammar, and to focus on their thoughts. After this, the students felt more comfortable. We laughed along the way at a few grammatical errors and I told them that I made those mistakes often; I assured them that we were equals.



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On the second day of the closure, there was one incident where the student went to the campus with the impression that the tutors would be there. There was miscommunication between students and staff because of the lack of clarity given in the original email from the university administration. However, the student was very open-minded and apologetic for not reading the email carefully. The Internet connection was worse than the previous day, and we had to resort to a phone call. The challenge never ends for us tutors because we feel more responsible to help the students.

The first challenge that day was that I did not have the student's paper to look at, so I asked her to email it to me. The second challenge was having her explain her problems while I carefully read the paper and scribbled notes – for once I felt like a secretary on a mission! The third challenge was explaining how she would cite her research paper properly, in MLA style, without having to physically show her how and why it was done that way.

We approached our problem like a treasure hunt – a map which had bullet points of what the student had to search for, how to use the automatic bibliography on Microsoft Word, and another plan to help her cite her sources for the paper. She patiently wrote the points down as I dictated to her, and I knew that I could only help her so much and the rest of the work was in her hands. A few days later, we met on campus and I inquired about how they had coped with the essay and the technology problems. I was pleased that they received very good marks on their final papers, while they were very grateful for the help they gained from the Writing Center. Although it was mostly their effort that was reflected in their marks, I was happy to hear their appreciation.

This hectic, we-hope-it-will-never-happen-again experience taught us many problem-solving skills, which helped both the peer tutor team and the tutees to be prepared to do anything, and be goal-oriented. It makes sense that the willingness to help others and patience are very vital characteristics for a peer tutor. This experience made us realize that being prepared and intuitive are innate features that peer tutors have, although we do not usually see them. As artistic peer tutors at VCUQatar, we learnt to appreciate our creative problem-solving skills when approaching tasks - thinking more outside the box. Our left side of the brain worked with writing, while our ever-busy right side figured out how to help the tutees through whatever form of communication and strategy it could come up with. As a result, we achieved our goals!

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this edition of the newsletter. Remember there can be no newsletter without your submissions! If interested in featuring in future editions, please send pieces to [sherry.ward@qatar.tamu.edu](mailto:sherry.ward@qatar.tamu.edu). Thanks again for your interest in MENAWCA. Tune in again in May 2014 for the next edition.