

The development and implementation of a student-delivered Writing Center service at an engineering university in the UAE

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“It's a nice little thing we've got going on. Don't
fix it if it's not broken.”

Student, Petroleum Institute



Background

- Tertiary level engineering institute
- English medium
- Engineering courses
- Humanities courses
- Communication courses
- Strategies for Team-based Engineering Problem-Solving (STEPS)



Factors affecting writing

- Language proficiency
- Preparation of students
- Curriculum and approach
- Writing requirements
- Teamwork
- Time constraints
- Instructor intervention
- Writing to learn



Why a writing center?

Develop more competent writers

Elevate the profile of writing

WAC

ABET/CAMS

LLL-engineers write!



What do they write?

- Project documentation
- Engineering notebook
- Internal company e-mails
- E-mail exchanges with other colleagues
- Presentations in meetings
- Contributions to instruction manuals
- Product definition documentation
- Presentations to senior management
- Internal training materials
- Standards-compliance documentation
- Technical explanations to marketing and sales personnel
- Conference papers
- Magazine articles.



Student empowerment

Students can too often be in a passive and receiving role which runs contrary to the concept of independence and LLL which is often part of our stated objectives.

Part of the conceptualization of the writing center was to give such independence and a degree of control to the students themselves.



Writing Centers at the Petroleum Institute

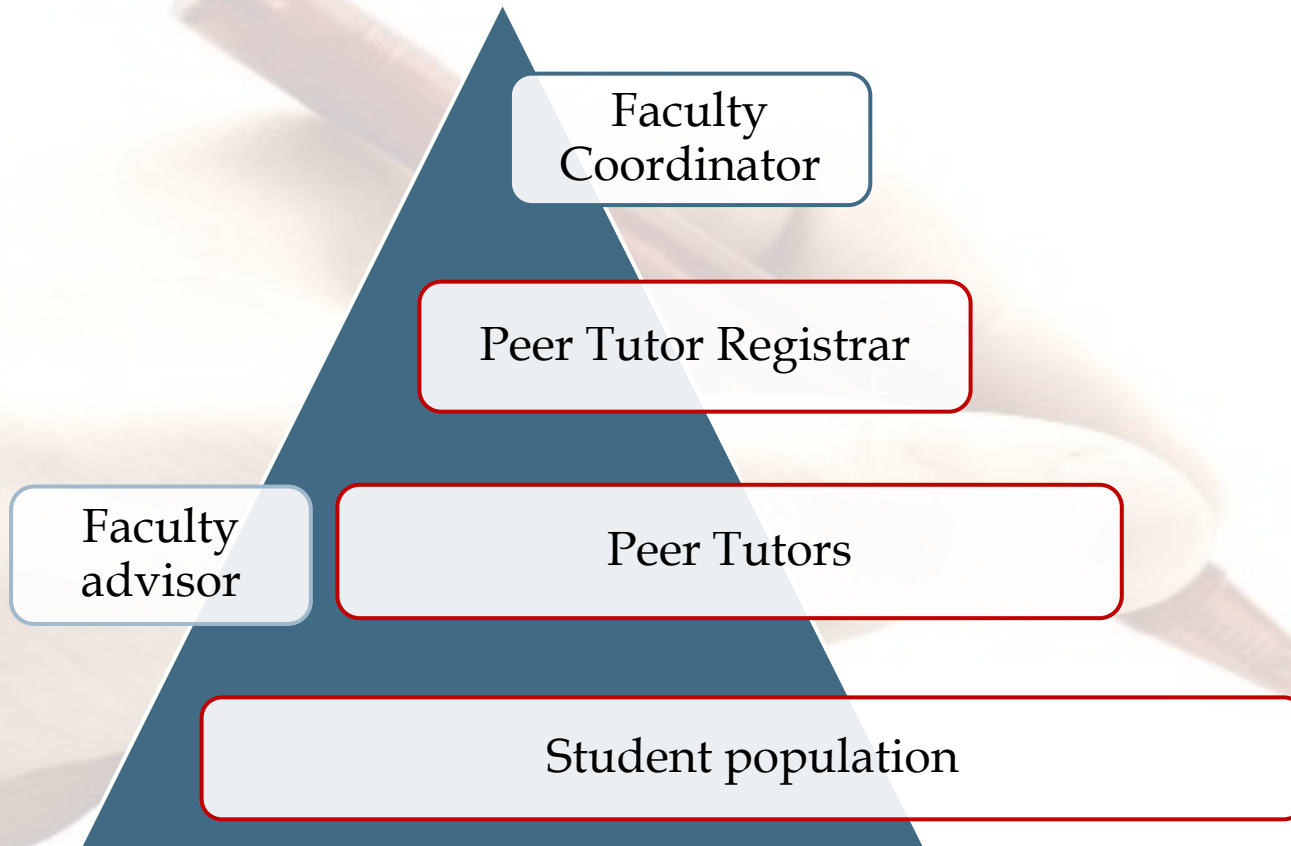
Gender-segregated institute – so 2 ‘campuses’.
Therefore:

- Writing Center for male students
- Writing Center for Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Program



Roles

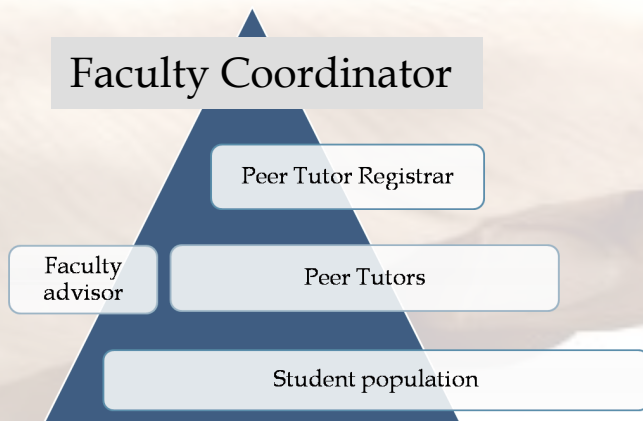
Each center is organized as follows:



Faculty coordinators

For each center, key functions include:

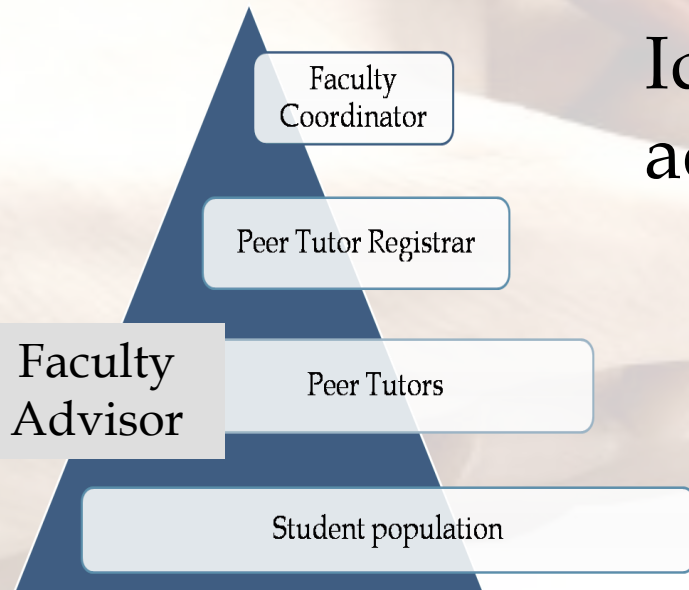
- Identifying, selecting and training new peer tutors
- Administration (contracts; time sheets)
 - Institute-wide promotion of service in conjunction with other coordinator
 - Standardization of activities across both centers



Faculty advisors

Key function of faculty advisors is to act as point-of-contact and monitor / mentor peer tutors on demand throughout the semester.

Ideal arrangement is one faculty advisor to one peer tutor.

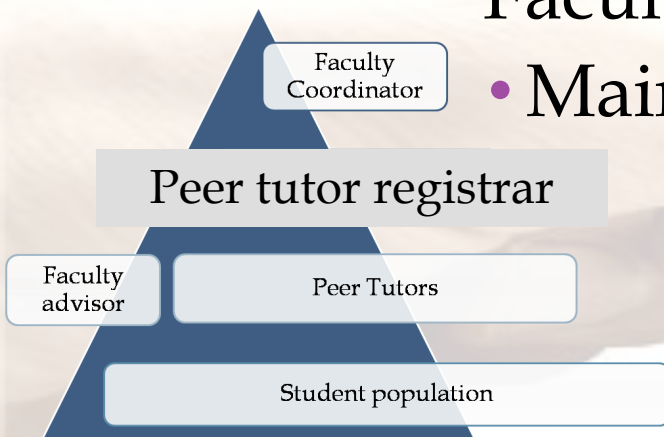


Peer tutor registrars

Key functions of the peer tutor registrar are:

- Collecting and collating usage data from other peer tutors
- Supplying a monthly summary of student use to Faculty Coordinator

• Maintaining appointments sign-up sheets

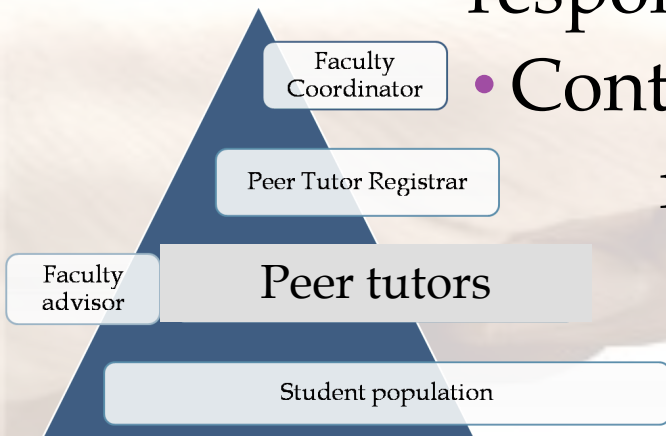


Peer tutors

Peer tutors are expected to:

- Attend all training workshops
- Be familiar with all Center materials and resources
- Tutor according to guidelines provided in “Action Flowchart for Writing Center Tutors”
- Carry out all associated administrative responsibilities

• Contribute to online Writing Center resources during free tutoring time



Peer tutors: Data gathering

Each peer tutor is required to maintain a personal record of student use showing:

- Tutoring date and length
- Major and year of student tutored
- Course / assignment for which student sought support
- Type of support provided
- Cumulative hours spent with student over semester



Tutor criteria and conditions of service

- Grade A in 2nd level Communication course
- Recommendation of Communication instructor
- Minimum CGPA of 2.5
- Good conduct record
- Interest in the writing process and in improving own writing
- Availability of up to 5 hours per week
- Payment at rate of AED50/hour



Tutor training

Two phases:

1. Workshops addressing:

- Relationships
- Skills and knowledge
- Application

2. Ongoing mentoring and support from Faculty Advisor



Attracting students to become peer tutors

Student population: 680 males and 331 females (2009-10).

No. of tutors is relatively small: currently there are 8 male tutors and 7 female.

For females, this allows a current availability of 31 hours, or 68% of the working week.

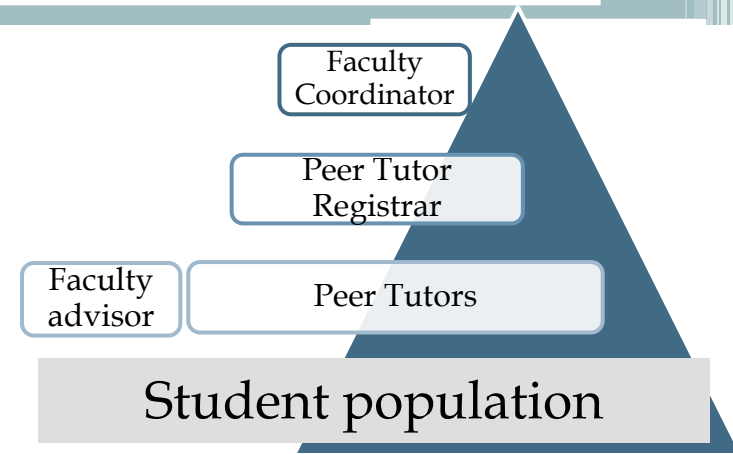


Encouraging students to use the service

Uptake of the service stands at 69% of the available time (female students).

Anecdotally it appeared that some students:

- Are not often encouraged by faculty to attend
- May feel that tutors lack necessary qualifications and experience
- Prefer to drop in, but are then deterred on finding a peer tutor occupied



Peer Tutoring

Reasons:

- Increases tutors' writing abilities
- Applies/develops tutors' skills
- Efficient learning (*tutors & tutees*)

Results in:

Students' self-improvement



A glance at tutoring sessions

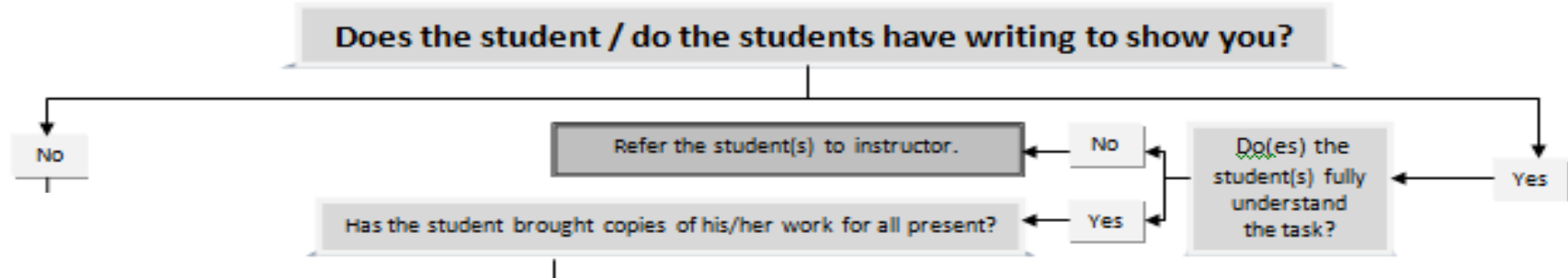
- Post schedules
- Students can make appointments OR drop-in anytime
- Receiving students
- Start the sessions

Main objective:

Teach students to improve and become independent writers



Action Flowchart for Writing Centre Tutors



A glance at tutoring sessions

WRITING CENTER TUTOR FUNCTIONS

- In reviewing writing, encourage the student to take notes on his/her copy.
- You can help the student to identify a problem or question or offer to focus on a key part of the writing.
- You can make comments and suggestions in some of the following areas:
 1. **Planning.** How effective is the student's outline / plan likely to be? What sources has he/she used?
 2. **Task fulfillment.** Does the writing answer the question or significantly contribute to it?
 3. **Organization.** Is the writing helpfully organized? Are there headings and subheadings? Are the ideas presented logically? Are the transitions between and within paragraphs appropriate?
 4. **Content.** Is the content relevant? Are appropriate examples provided?



A glance at tutoring sessions

WRITING CENTER TUTOR FUNCTIONS

- In reviewing writing, encourage the student to take notes on his/her copy.
- You can help the student to identify a problem or question or offer to focus on a key part of the writing.
- You can make comments and suggestions in some of the following areas:
 5. **Readability.** Is the writing reader-friendly? Are all sentences clear and concise? Can you identify topic sentences in paragraphs?
 6. **Academic standards.** Are citations correctly formatted and documented? Does the writer make appropriate use of a range of grammatical structures and academic vocabulary?
 7. **Proofreading and presentation.** Is the writing free from minor errors in spelling, punctuation etc.? Is the work presented to PI standards?



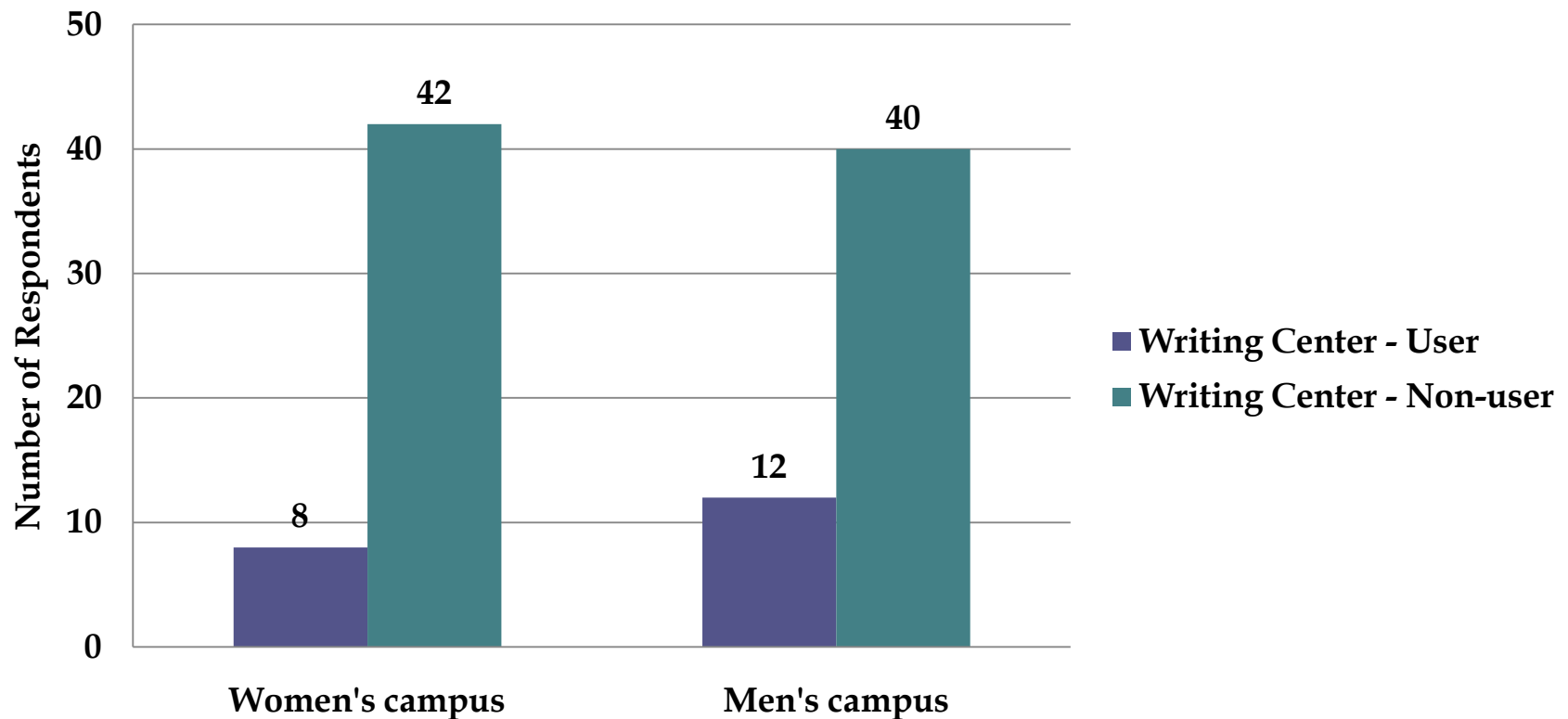
Peer tutoring: *Recommendations*

- On-going training
- Faculty observation
- Attract students to the WC
- Connect WC to writing classes



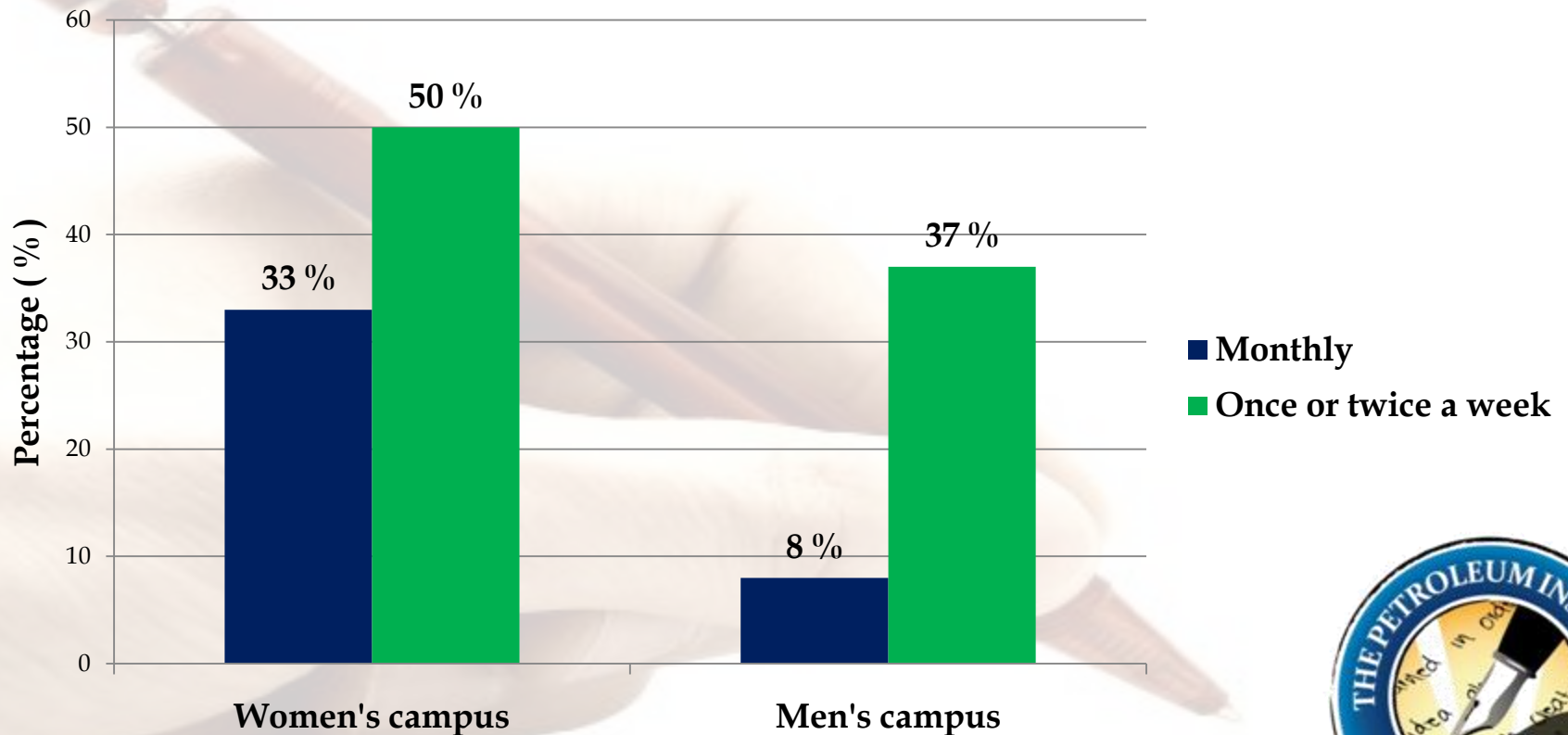
Data Collection

Chart 1: The number of students who participated in the Writing Center Development Survey (N = 102). Survey was conducted in December 2010.



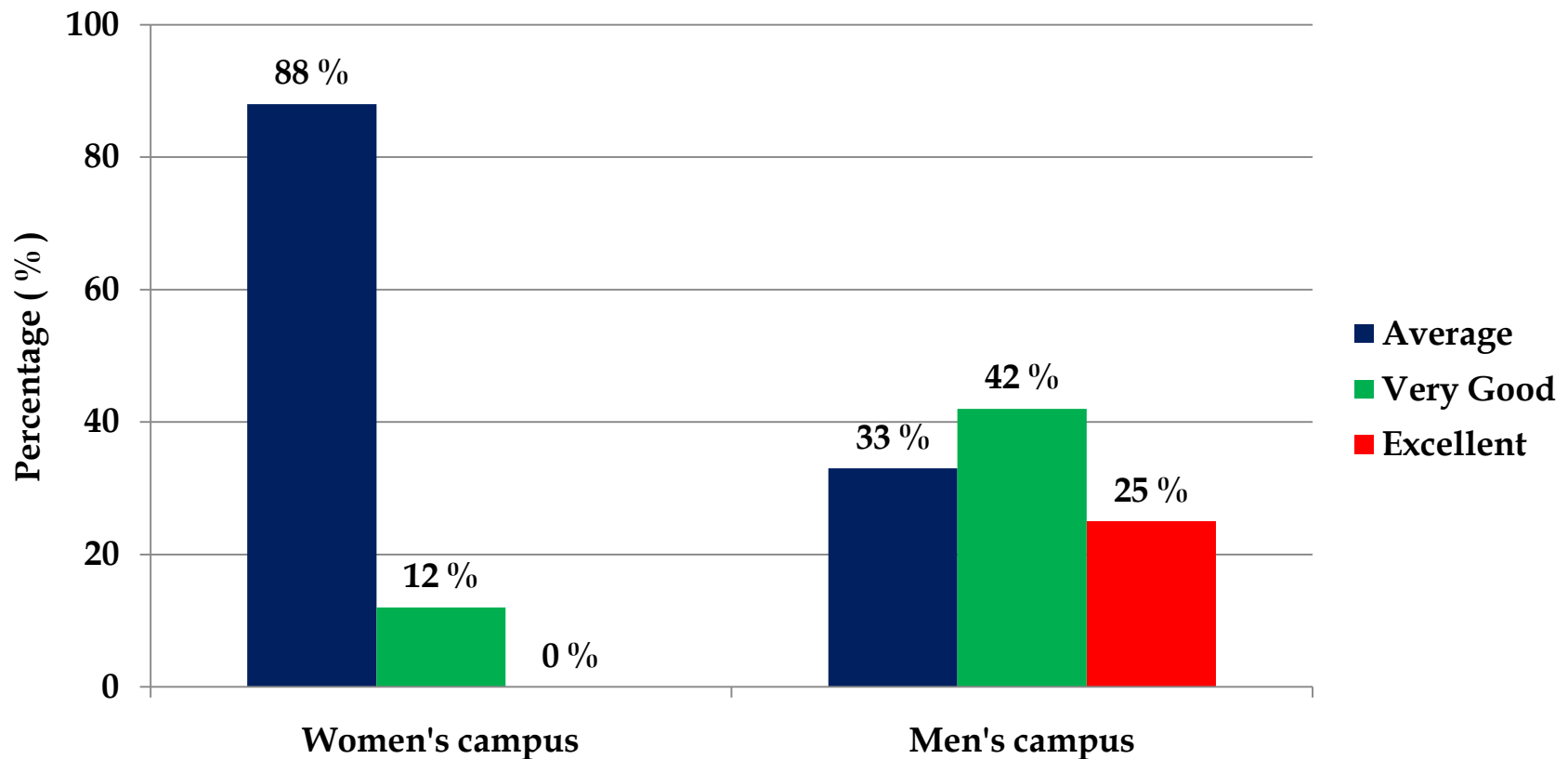
Writing Center User – Profile

Chart 2: How often do you generally visit the Writing Center during semesters? (N = 20).



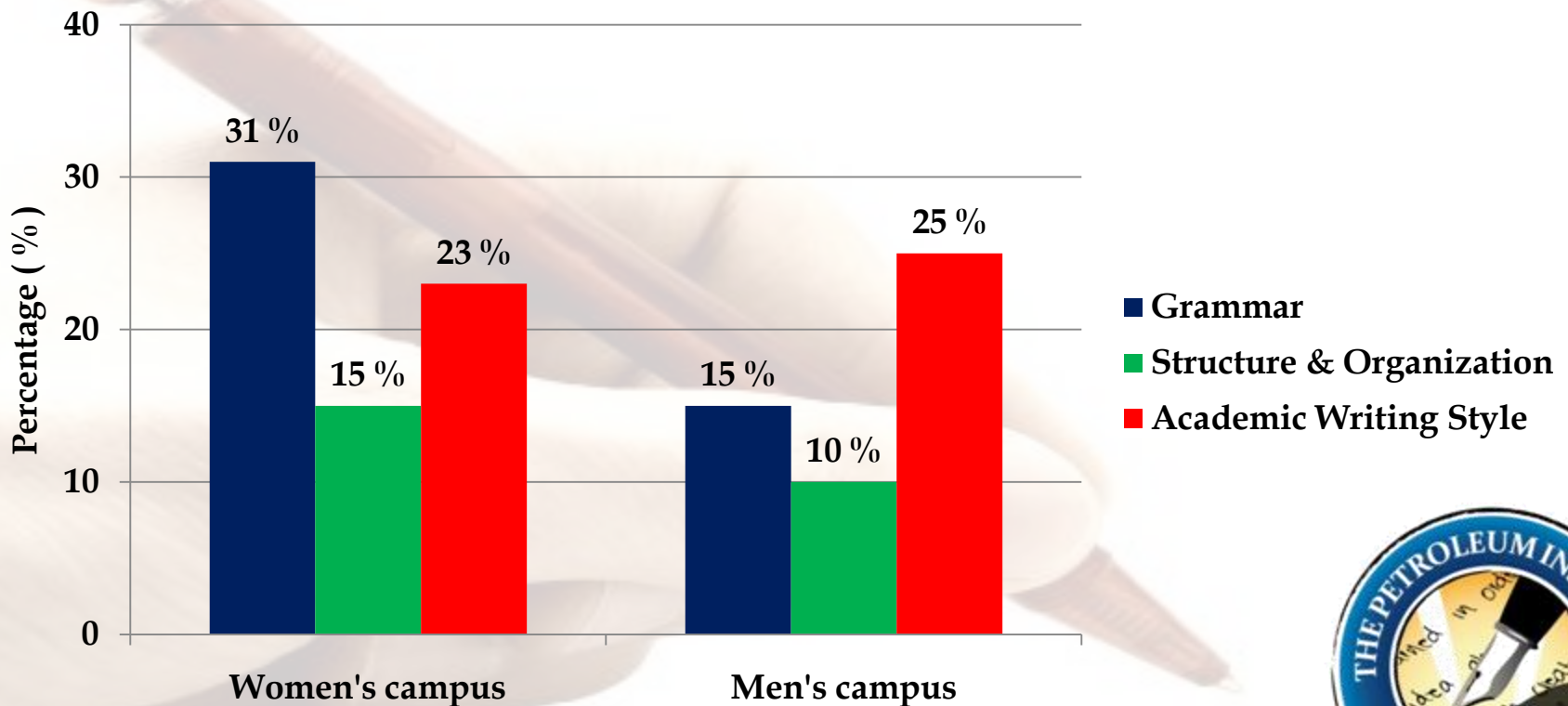
Writing Center User – Profile

Chart 3: How would you rate your own writing skills? (N = 20).



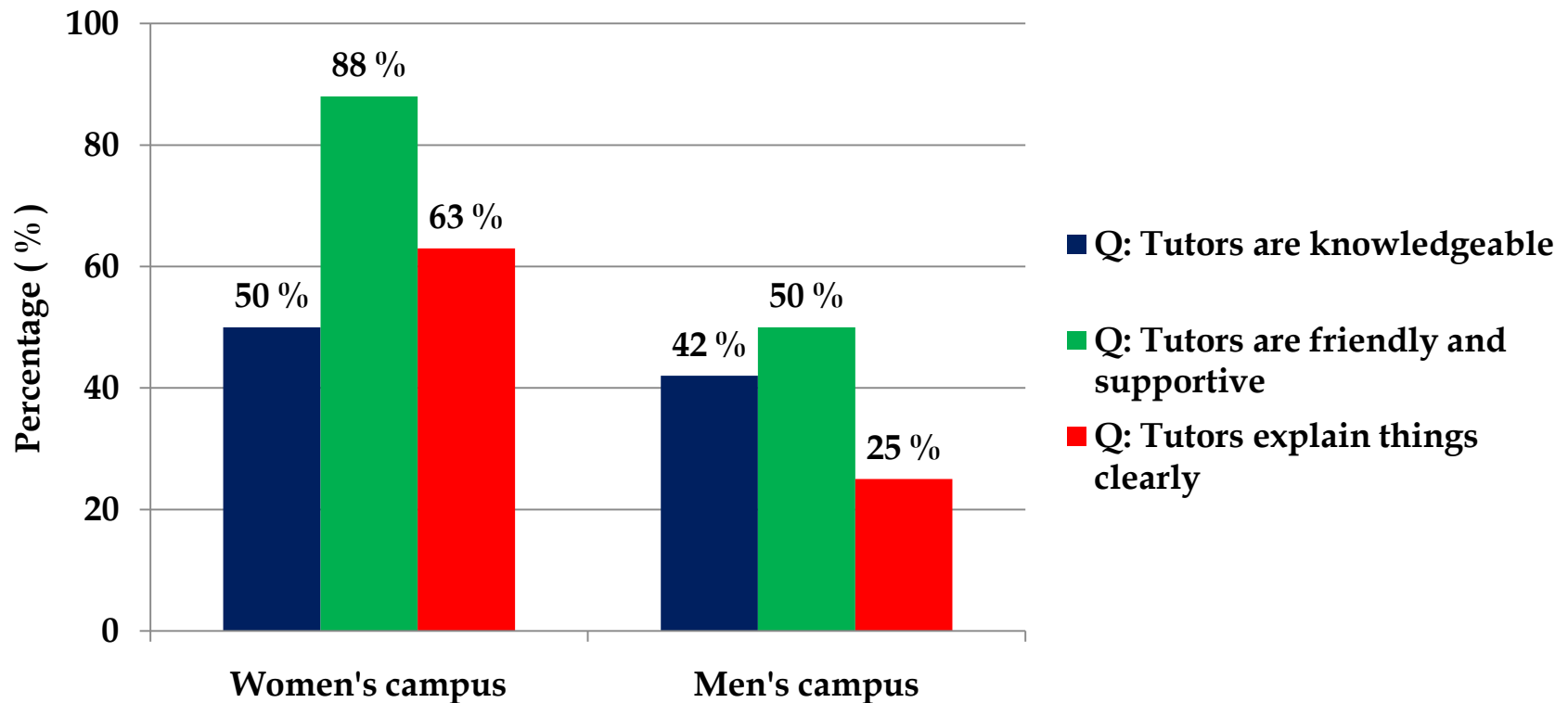
Writing Center Identifying Writing Issues

Chart 4: What kind of writing issues did you discuss at your last tutoring session? (N = 20).



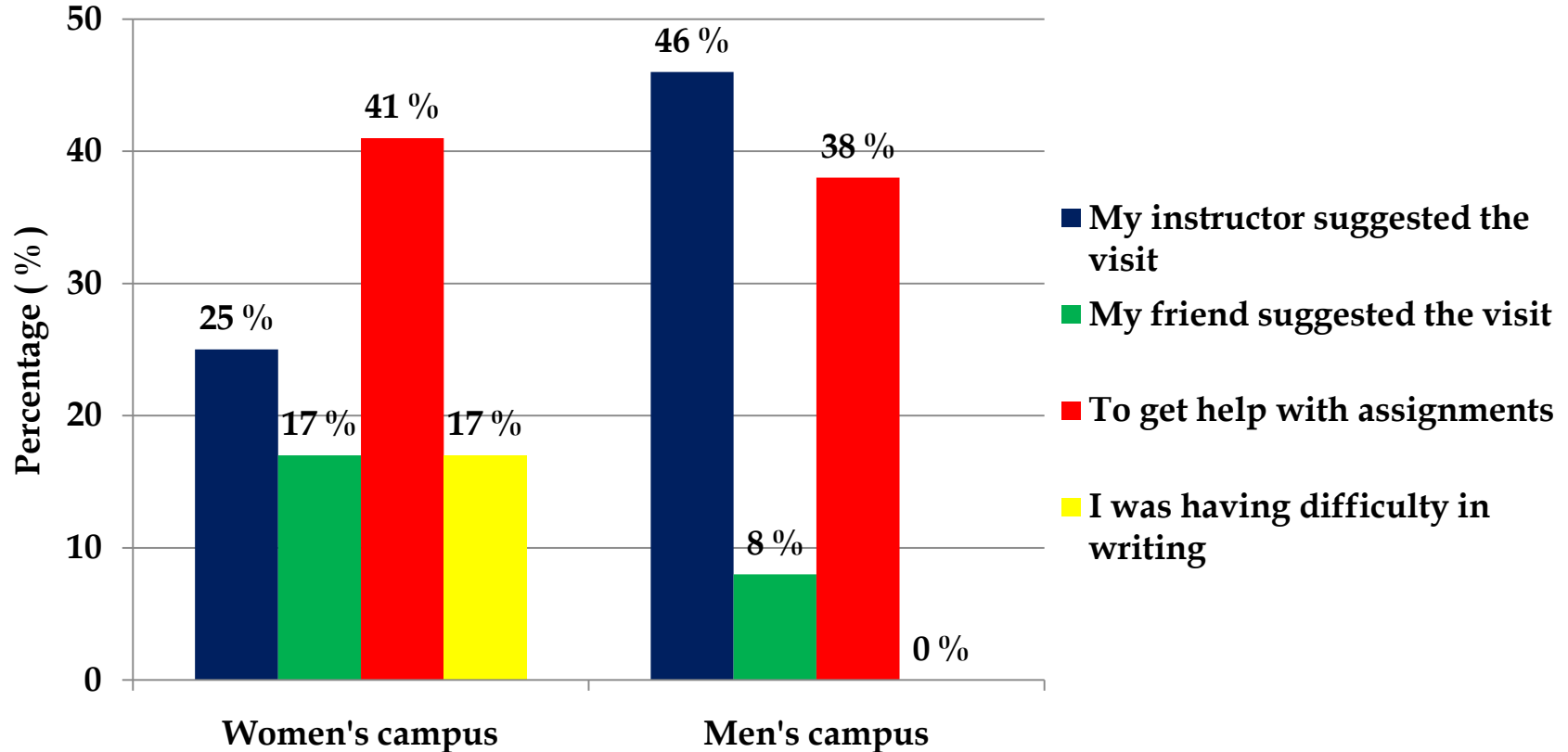
Writing Center Peer-tutor Evaluation

Chart 5: Evaluation of peer-tutors by the Writing Center users. Percentage of Writing Center users that 'strongly agree' with the statement. (N = 20).



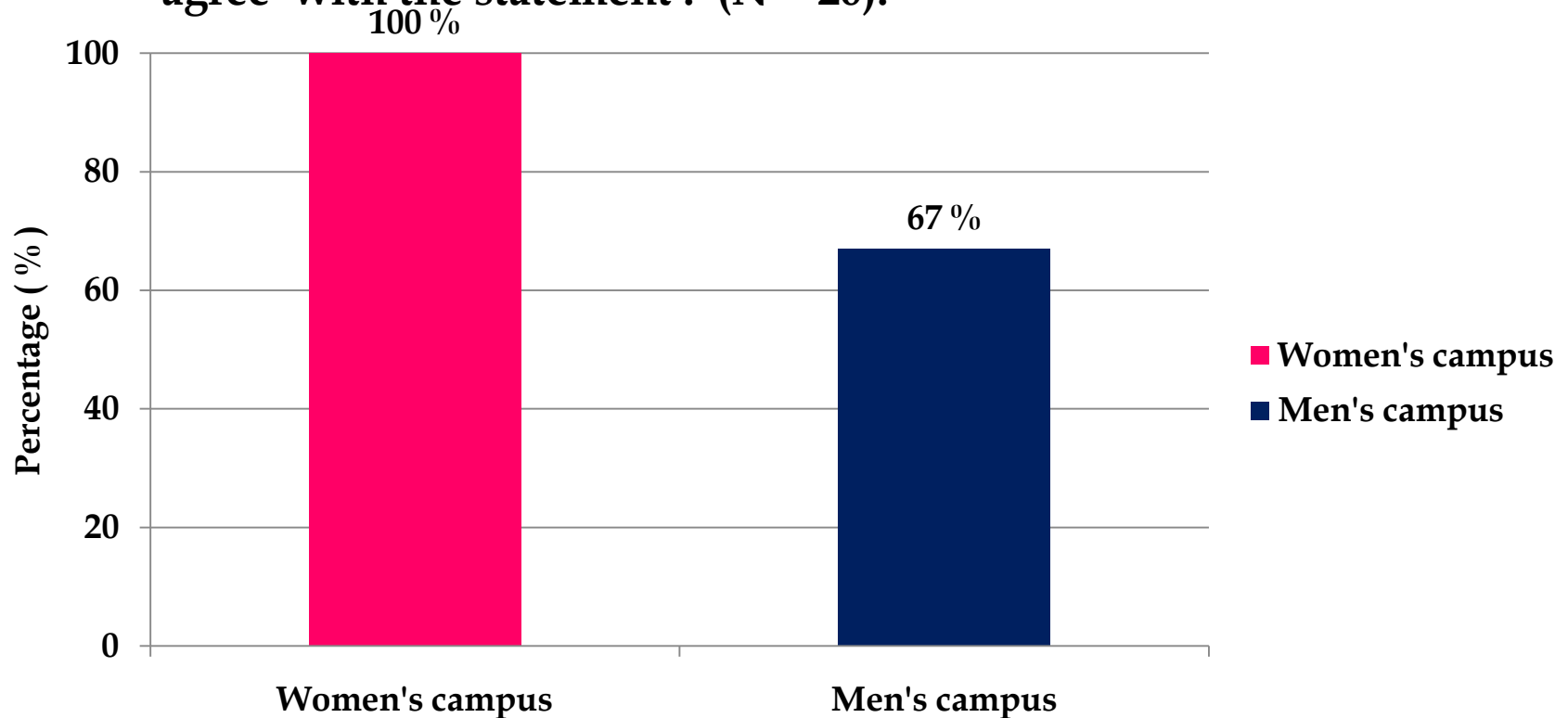
Writing Center Initial Contact - Reasons

Chart 6: Why (what reasons) did you first visit the Writing Center? (N = 20).



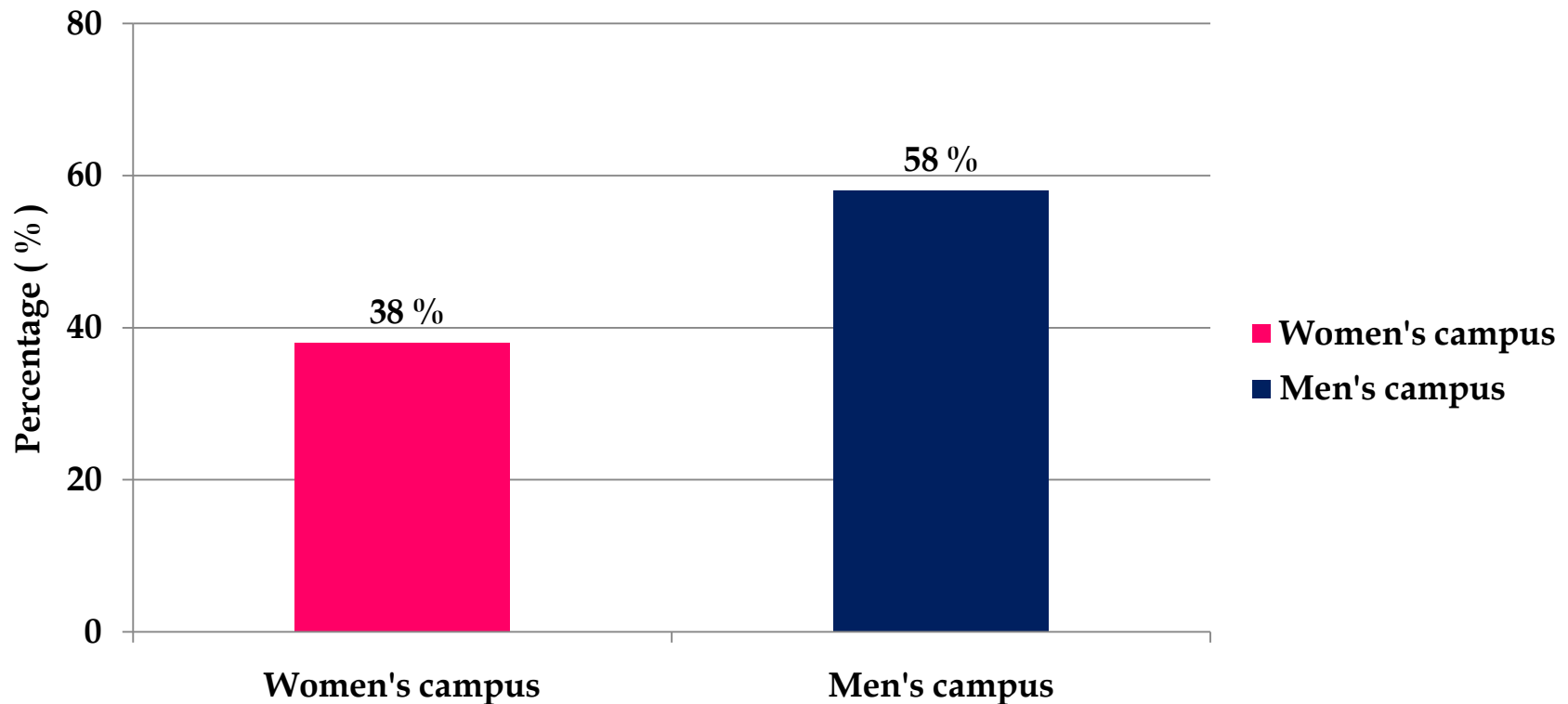
Writing Center Overall Benefit

Chart 7: The Writing Center has helped me improve my writing skills. The percentage of users that 'agree or strongly agree' with the statement . (N = 20).



Writing Center Training Needs

Chart 8: Tutors need further training. Percentage of Writing Center users that 'strongly agree' with the statement. (N = 20).



The future

- Training initiatives – enhanced of Writing Center activity
- Writing Center Tutor certification – ongoing professional development for peer-tutors
- Autonomy



Questions and discussion



Thank you

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