Fall 2013 Faculty Survey

Last semester, the Academic Support Center (ASC) sent out a survey, titled “The State of Critical Writing at UDC”, to all full-time, visiting, and adjunct professors. The main goal was to learn more about UDC faculty’s perceptions of their students’ writing levels and needs in order to fine-tune the tutoring support that we provide at the ASC. The survey included four key questions, giving the respondent an opportunity to answer a question with a scaled response as well as questions where they could check all the options that applied. There was also space to type in additional comments.

The ASC received a total of 47 responses and 22 individual comments. In assessing the overall level of their students’ writing, UDC professors noted that over 50% of their students “barely meet the level required for the course” and 30% are writing “below the level required for the course”. Students have particular difficulty with basic grammar and mechanical rules and with the clarity or coherence of their writing. Other issues include: sentence structure, paragraph development and word choice.

For a question about writing essay-style papers, 62% of the respondents identified organizing the body of a paper and developing a paper into a coherent narrative as two areas that their students struggle with. A majority also felt students had difficulty with crafting the thesis (60%) and researching appropriate sources (58%). For the question about writing research papers, over 70% of the respondents felt their students’ main difficulty was with formatting citations, footnotes, and references according to MLA, APA, or Chicago styles, while 64% said that integrating sources into the paper was also problematic. The majority also identified developing the research question or hypothesis (55%), developing the paper into a coherent narrative (55%), and plagiarism (55%) as key concerns.

Many of the comments indicated that students do not have foundational skills in grammar and sentence structure. One respondent suggested requiring an entrance essay as part of the application process; another felt that the students’ foundational deficits could be alleviated by strengthening the Reading Improvement and Fundamentals classes. Another issue articulated was that because there is no consensus of the faculty as to what constitutes “strong academic writing”, students often get mixed messages about the quality of their writing from one class to the next. ~~~~
Meet the Tutors!

The Academic Support Center is proud of our team of accomplished student tutors. Here is the 2013-14 team!

Mohamad Abukela MD, MPH is currently working on his Master’s Degree in Applied Statistics in the Mathematics Department at UDC. Mohamad tutors students in English, writing, mathematics, and research design methods. He can also provide assistance with the following documentation styles: APA MLA, and Chicago.

Natasha Bennett is a law student at the UDC School of Law, class of 2016. She is also the Vice-President of the Christian Law Society. Natasha specializes in tutoring in English and law related courses. If you are interested in learning more about the UDC School of Law and its admission process, please visit her at the Academic Support Center.

Kate Hilton-Hayward is currently a junior at UDC, completing a Bachelor of Science at UDC, with a major in psychology. Kate tutors students in English, French, and foundational mathematics. She also teaches students how to use the more advanced features of Microsoft Office Suite, including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel and can help students with study and critical thinking skills.

Clay Robbins is a senior at UDC and will be graduating in May, 2014. He is majoring in political science and will be presenting a paper at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists this spring. He is also a member of the UDC men’s Lacrosse team. Clay is an English and writing tutor.

Mirchaye Sahlu is a junior at UDC majoring in mass media, with concentrations in television production and journalism. Mirchaye plans to graduate in May, 2015. She tutors English and French and can also help in PowerPoint, Publisher, Excel, Adobe Photoshop, Final Cut Pro and Garage Band.

Francisco Torres, an international student from Paraguay majoring in English, will be graduating from UDC in May, 2014. He is the Spanish tutor and also tutors in English and writing. His areas of expertise are teaching Spanish as a foreign language and outlining, writing and reviewing papers in Spanish and English.

The Pre-tutoring Checklist (or What to Do While You’re Waiting to be Tutored)

Let’s face it: writing—any kind of writing—can be difficult. This is especially true if writing is not on your list of favorite things to do. The Academic Support Center provides one-on-one tutoring for students on any assignment in nearly any discipline. Even so, here are some things you can do while you’re waiting to be tutored:

- Do a quick spelling and grammar check. (If you’re using Microsoft Word, this function is available under the “Review” section.)
- Fix formatting and spacing problems.
- Read your paper just loud enough for you to hear yourself. (This works best with a hard copy.)
  Students find most of their errors this way.
- Highlight the thesis statement or main idea of your paper in 1-2 sentences. If you can’t, chances are your professor won’t be able to either!
- Make sure that each paragraph in the body of your paper includes a topic sentence. (For help with this, ask for the M.E.A.L. handout.)
- Check for run-on sentences and overly-long paragraphs. Try to see if you can find a good place for a natural break.
- Review the written assignment and make sure that you have followed your professor’s instructions. Check to see if you have addressed each component of the assignment; if not, make a plan to come back to sections that still need to be answered.
- Finally, underline or highlight specific sections you’d like to ask the tutor about. Jot down any questions.